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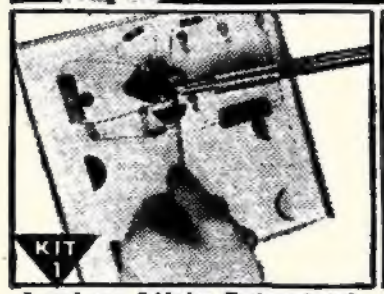

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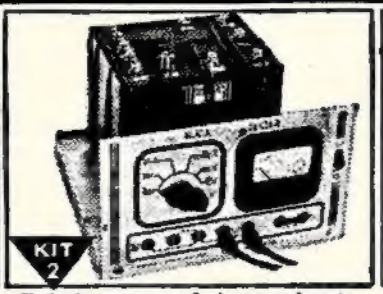

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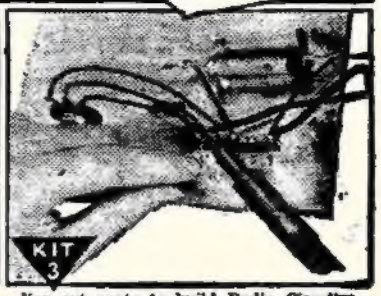

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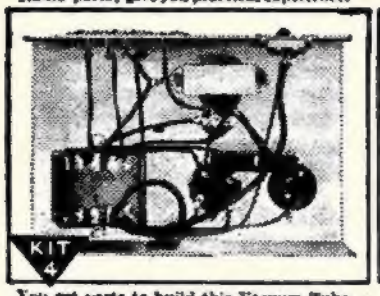

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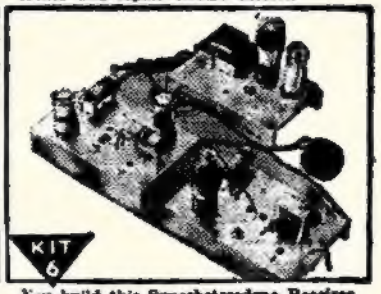

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THE WILL OF CLAUDE ASHUR . . . . . C. Hall Thompson 6
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Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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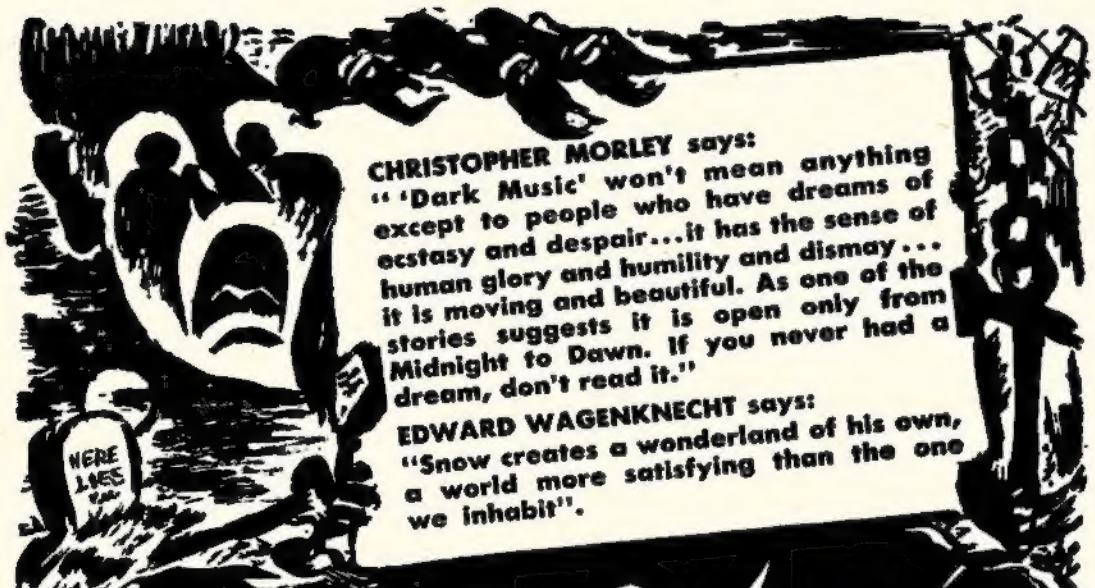

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The Will of Claude Ashur

I

THEY have locked me in. A moment since, for what well may have been the last time, I heard the clanking of the triple-bolts as they were shot into place. The door to this barren white chamber presents no extraordinary appearance, but it is plated with impenetrable steel. The executives of the Institution have gone to great pains to ensure the impossibility of escape. They know my record. They have listed me among those patients who are dangerous and "recurrently violent." I haven't contradicted them; it does no good to tell them that my violence is long since spent; that I have no longer the inclination nor the strength requisite to make yet another attempted break for freedom. They cannot understand that my freedom meant something to me only so long as there was hope of saving Gratia Thane from the horror that returned from the flesh-rotting brink of the grave to reclaim her. Now, that hope is lost; there is nothing left but the welcome release of death. I can die as well in an insane asylum as elsewhere.

Today, the examinations, both physical and mental, were quickly dispensed with. They were a formality; routine gone through "for the record." The doctor has left. He wasn't the man who usually examines me. I presume he is new at the Institution. He was a tiny man, fastidiously dressed, with a

BY C. HALL THOMPSON

narrow, flushed face and a vulgar diamond stickpin. There were lines of distaste and fear about his mouth from the moment he looked into the loathesome mask that is my face. Doubtless one of the white-suited attendants warned him of the particular horror of my case. I didn't resent it when he came no nearer me than necessary. Rather, I pitied the poor devil for the awkwardness of his situation; I have known men of obviously stronger stomach to stumble away from the sight of me, retching with sick terror. My name, the unholy whisperings of my story, the remembrance of the decaying, breathing half-corpse that I am, are legendary in the winding gray halls of the Asylum. I cannot blame them for being relieved by the knowledge that they will soon shed the burden I have been—that, before long, they will consign this unhuman mass of pulsating flesh to maggots and oblivion.

Before the doctor left, he wrote something in his notebook; there would be the name: Claude Ashur. Under today's date he has written only a few all-explanatory words. "Prognosis negative. Hopelessly insane. Disease in most advanced stage. Demise imminent."

Watching the slow, painful progress of his pen across the paper, I experienced one last temptation to speak. I was overwhelmed with a violent need to scream out my now-familiar protest to this new man, in the desperate hope that he might believe me. The blasphemous words welled for an instant in my throat, sending forth a thick nasal sob. Quickly, the doctor glanced up, and the apprehensive loathing of his gaze told me the truth. It would do no good to speak. He was like all the rest, with their soothing voices and unbelievable smiles. He would listen to the hideous nightmare that is the story of Gratia and my brother and myself, and, in the end, he would nod calmly, more convinced than ever that I was stark, raving mad. I remained silent. The last flame of hope guttered and died. I knew in that mo-

---

Evil legends hang over this ancient coastal village and its infamous secret more terrible than all the terrors of Night

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

ment, that no one would ever believe that I am not Claude Ashur.

Claude Ashur is my brother.

DO NOT misunderstand me. This is no mundane instance of confused identity. It is something infinitely more evil. It is a horror conceived and realized by a warped brain bent upon revenge; a mind in league with the powers of darkness, attuned to the whimpering of lost, forbidden rites and incantations. No one ever could have mistaken me for Claude Ashur. To the contrary, from the earliest days of our childhood, people found it difficult to believe that we were brothers. There could not have been two creatures more unlike than he and I. If you will imagine the average boy and man, the medium-built creature of normal weight and nondescript features, whose temperament is safely, if somewhat dully balanced —in short, the product of normalcy—you will have before you a portrait of myself. My brother, Claude, was the precise antithesis of all these things.

He was always extremely delicate of health, and given to strange moodiness. His head seemed too large for the fragility of his body, and his face was constantly shadowed by a pallor that worried my father dreadfully.

His nose was long and thin with supersensitive nostril-volutes, and his eyes, set well apart in deep sockets, held a sort of mirthless brilliance. From the outset, I was the stronger as well as the elder, and yet it was always Claude with his frail body and powerful will who ruled Inneswich Priory.

At a certain point in the road that fingers its way along the lifeless, Atlantic-clawed stretches of the Northern New Jersey coast, the unsuspecting traveler may turn off into a bramble-clotted byway. There is (or was, at one time), a signpost pointing inland that proclaims: "INNESWICH—½ MILE." Not many take that path today. People who know that part of the country, give wide berth to Inneswich and the legends that hang like a slimy caul over the ancient coastal village. They have heard infamous tales of the Priory that lies on the northernmost edge of Inneswich, and of late years, the town, the Priory, the few intrepid villagers who cling to their homes, have fallen into ill-repute. Things were different in the days before the coming of Claude Ashur.

My father, Edmund Ashur, was the pastor of the Inneswich Lutheran Church; he had come to the Priory, a timid, middle-aged man with his young bride, two years before I was born. The night Claude Ashur was born Inneswich Priory became the house of death.

THE night Claude was born. I have never really thought of it in that way; to me, it has always been the night my mother died. Even I, child that I was, had been caught in the web of the pervading sense of doom that hung over Inneswich Priory all that day. A damp sea-breeze, smelling of rain, had swept westward, and perforce, I had spent the day indoors. The house had been uncannily quiet, with only the muffled footfalls of my father, pacing in the library, trying to smile when his gaze chanced to meet mine. I did not know, then, that the time for the accouchement was near. I knew only that, in the last weeks, my mother had been too pale, and the huge, cold rooms seemed lonely for her laughter. Toward nightfall, the village physician, a round apple-cheeked man named Ellerby, was summoned; he brought me taffy from the general store as he always did, and shortly after he disappeared up the wide staircase, I was packed off to bed. For what seemed like hours I lay in the dark, while a leaden bulwark of clouds rolled inland with the storm. Rain lashing against my casement, I fell to sleep at last, crying because my mother hadn't come to kiss me goodnight.

I thought it was the screaming that woke me. I know, now, that the pain-torn cries had died long-since with my mother's last shuddering breath. Perhaps some final plaintive echo had slithered along the blackened halls finding my sleep-fogged, child's brain at last. A cold, nameless terror numbed me as I crept down the winding carpeted stairs. At the newelpost, a soft, desperate lost sound stopped me. And then, through the open library door, I saw them. My father was sunken in a leather arm chair by the fireless grate; candlelight wavered on the hands that covered his face. Uncontrollable sobs wracked his bowed shoulders. After a moment, his face more

solemn and pallid than I had ever seen it. Dr. Ellerby came from the shadow beyond my view. His thin, ineffectual hand touched Father's arm gently. His voice was thick.

"I . . . I know how little words help, Edmund. . . . I just want you to know, I did all I could. Mrs. Ashur was . . ." He shrugged his plump shoulders in impotent rage at fate. "She just wasn't strong enough. It was odd; as if the baby were too much for her—too powerful—taking all the strength, the will from her. It was as if . . ."

His words withered into nothingness, and crawling abysmal darkness clawed at me. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't. Fear and loneliness knotted in my chest. I could barely breathe. Years later, the completion of that last unfinished sentence of Ellerby's became more and more horribly clear to me. "It was as if he had killed her, so that he could live. . . ."

They buried Mother in a shaded corner of the graveyard behind the church. The villagers came and stood in the needling downpour, their heads bowed in voiceless grief. And through all of it, irreverent and demanding, came the belligerant howling of the infant Claude; there was something blasphemous and terribly wrong about those dominant cries. It was as though, somehow, this dark-browed brawling child was an intimate of death and felt no need to grieve or be frightened in the face of it.

From that day forth, Inneswich Priory was Claude Ashur's private domain. It is true that the howling, open belligerence soon quieted, and even in his early boyhood, Claude's voice attained an unusually sibilant modulation. But, never did it become less dominant. On the contrary, the very calm softness of it seemed to lend it more strength, more power to influence the listener. It was Claude's will, not his voice, that ruled the Priory and everyone in it. The voice was merely an instrument of the will.

My father was Claude's slave. All the tender unpretentious love he had given my mother before her death was now lavished on Claude. I believe Father saw in him a final remembrance of the gentle creature whose grave was never bare of flowers. I was sorry for Father. For, from the outset, that brooding, frail creature seemed not to need love or help. All his life, Claude Ashur was coldly self-sufficient, and completely capable of getting anything he wanted.

Worry over the dubious condition of Claude's health led my father into further extravagances. Rather than send Claude to school, which would necessitate his leaving the gloomy protection of the Priory, Father brought in a series of tutors. The plan was never a success. Time and again, it started off well, and some bookish, middle-aged man or woman would think that he or she had a perfectly priceless berth at the Priory. The tutelage of one boy seemed like the easiest job in the world. But, invariably, the tutors eventually developed a violent dislike,

hidden or overt, for Claude. They never remained at Inneswich Priory more than a fortnight. Often, when one of them had just gone, I would chance to look up from the garden to find Claude's pale, thin face framed in a window. The colorless lips were always haunted by a satisfied, malignant smile. And, once more, the brash intruder cast out, the furtive shadow of my brother's isolationism would settle, shroud-like, over the Priory.

II

IN THE Eastern Wing of Inneswich Priory, beyond a massive, baroque door, lay a chamber I had never seen. Unholy stories of that room have haunted the hamlet of Inneswich since one ghastly night late in the 18th Century. My father never spoke of the awesome legends that cluttered, murmuring obscenely, behind that carven portal. It was enough for him that, for more than a hundred years, the room had been sealed off and forgotten. But, Claude and I had heard others—the hired help who came by day from the village to the Priory—whisper the hideous details many times, seeming to relish the vicarious thrill they experienced while discussing past and hidden evil.

In the year 1793, one Jabez Driesen, then pastor of Inneswich Church, returned from a sabbatical spent in Europe. He brought with him the woman he had met and married on the Continent. There are written reports of her beauty in the archives of the library at Inneswich, but, for the most part, they are at cross-purposes and garbled. On one issue alone, every report is in accord. The wife of Jabez Driesen was a secret disciple of witchcraft; she had been born in some obscure Hungarian village of ill-repute, and it was whispered through the streets of Imeswich that this sorceress—this consort of the darkness—must die. The whispering grew to an open protest that reached Jabez Driesen's ears, and, one night a frantic, witless crone who served the Driesens ran screaming from the Priory. Investigating the reason for her babbling hysteria, the villagers found the answer in that chamber in the East Wing. The charred remains of Jabez Driesen's bride were discovered, manacled to a stake in the tremendous, ancient fireplace, and, swinging noiselessly from one of the massive, hand-squared ceiling beams, was the corpse of the pastor of Inneswich Church. Next day, the bodies were removed and buried, and the room was sealed. When Claude Ashur was twelve years of age, he claimed that chamber for his own.

Father was more worried than ever; at last, he openly admitted that he was frightened of Claude's tendency to isolationism. With the acquisition of the room in the East Wing, Claude withdrew almost entirely from the outer world. There was something alarming and unhealthy in the way he spent whole days and nights alone in his inviolable sanctum. The heavy, exquisitely carved door was kept locked at all times. Occasionally, on clear, dry days, Claude would wander aimlessly for hours along the bleached desert of the beach; he always carried the key to that door with him. Prompted by my own curiosity and my father's concern, I tried often to find some basis of mutual interest that would draw me closer to Claude—that would put me in a position where I might learn the nature of the secrets he hid so jealously in his lonely, ghost-ridden room. Once or twice, I even made a move to join him in his solitary expeditions along the edge of the sea. His dark, resentful taciturnity soon made it obvious that I wasn't welcome. In the end, nagged by a vague sense of frustration, I gave it up. I should probably never have had the courage to defy Claude, and break into the forbidden chamber, had it not been for my Irish Setter, Tam.

Aware, as he was, of my affection for dogs, on the eve of my twenty-second birthday, Father presented me with Tam. Then little more than a year old, the dog was already well-trained; he had the keen intelligence, the gentle eyes, the shining russet hair that somehow set his breed in a special niche. In no time at all, Tam and I were inseparable companions. Wherever I went, Tam was at my heels. His coltish, often hilarious adventures, served to lighten somewhat the gloom that had coated Inneswich Priory like some loathesome, smothering scum that happiness and sunlight could not penetrate. And, from the moment he laid eyes on him, Claude resented Tam.

As though by some inborn instinct, the dog avoided my brother on every possible occasion. It was nothing new. Without exception, animals of every sort displayed an often vicious aversion to Claude. It was as if their antidiluvian sensitiveness warned them against some buried evil of which the duller senses of humans were unaware. Generally, this open enmity caused nothing but a rather sardonic amusement on Claude's part. But, in the case of Tam, he seemed unusually irritated. Perhaps it was because, unwittingly, the dog was violating the domain so long controlled by Claude's will alone. In any event, in a manner that somehow roused uneasy suspicion in me, he made an unwonted effort to befriend Tam.

ON THAT particular afternoon, Tam and I had been having our habitual romp in the ash-shaded, quiet of the Priory garden. I remember laughing at the way Tam bounded off after an autumn-decayed twig of ash I had tossed in the direction of the flagstone terrace that lay just without the French casements of the library. Then, abruptly, before he had reached the twig, the setter stopped short. I saw his lean rusty body, dappled by late-afternoon sun, grow tense; his muzzle trembled, baring vicious canines. The frolicsome, gentle Tam of a moment before had turned into a terrified animal at bay.

I looked up and saw Claude standing over the ash-twig Tam had been chasing. He was smiling, his pale lips warped, showing small white teeth, but there was no humor in his eyes. Behind them lay the shadow of angry annoyance. I thought he winced at the snarl that sounded in Tam's throat. And then, before I could interfere, with a harsh furious laugh, Claude made a wild grab for the dog. I heard him say, "Come here, you little devil!" I heard Tam's hysterical yelp, and then, a sharp exclamation of pain.

"Tam!" I cried. "Down, Tam! Down!"

As suddenly as it had begun, the terrible furor quieted. A pregnant, awful stillness settled on the ash-grove. A single leaf quivered to the chilled stones at my feet. Tam whimpered plaintively as he slunk toward me, and cowered, shivering, against my leg. Claude didn't swear; he didn't even speak. He stood very still, staring down at the blood that oozed obscenely from the wicked gashes that scored the back of his white-skinned hand. When his eyes shifted to the shuddering beast at my side, they were seething with a pent-up malevolence that whispered of satanic hatred older than man himself; a fury born of lost eons when such hatred ruled the world. After a long moment, Claude turned on his heel, and disappeared through the French windows into the murky dimness of the library. The hand with which I gave Tam a reassuring pat trembled. I told myself I was being foolish; there was no need to be afraid. But, the following evening, Tam disappeared.

At dusk, I had gone to the kennel to unleash Tam and take him for his nightly run into the village. I had found only the ragged end of the leash tethered to a metal ring by the kennel door. And standing there, in the gathering, mist-choked darkness, I had a sudden vision of the controlled rage in Claude's bloodless face, and that forbidding, truth-hiding door in the East Wing. I shuddered. I argued that I was letting my imagination run away with me. It was possible that Tam had gnawed his way to freedom, and dashed on to the village ahead of me. But, even before I walked the night-road to Inneswich, before I made inquiries at the tavern, and questioned the children who played Lie-Low-Sheepy in the streets, I knew what the answers would be. No one had seen or heard of Tam since last night when he'd been to the village with me. A strange, frozen anger took possession of me as I returned to Inneswich Priory that night. I knew that I was going to violate Claude Ashur's sanctuary.

Before retiring, the housekeeper had left a tray in the library for me. There were sandwiches and scones and a pot of chocolate. I didn't touch any of it. Strangely wary, I crept through the catacombs of lower hall, and in the sepulchral gloom of the pantry, found what I wanted. From a rusty, seldom-used tool-chest, I extracted a length of heavy wire; I bent one end of it into a neat hook, then, soundlessly, tensely, as before, I went back along the hall and climbed the wide, winding staircase. Somewhere in the house, a weary joist groaned eerie, century-old protest. From his room at the head of the stairs, came Father's heavy,

reassuringly human snore. A little further on, the door to Claude's bedchamber was ajar. There was no light. I paused, not breathing, and stared into the stygian blackness of the room. Slowly, cold watery moonlight picked out Claude's form sprawled across the great canopied bed. His breathing came slow and deep. With a painstaking furtiveness that somewhat surprised me, I closed his door and moved on through cloying shadows toward the chamber in the East Wing.

I was not sure I could do it. The twisted wire wavered in my unsteady fingers, rattling like hell-wrought ghost chains in the antiquated lock. I don't know how long I manipulated the wire before I was rewarded by the sullen, rasping click of reluctant tumblers. Under the pressure of my sweat-damp hand, the massive door swung inward. At first, there was nothing but a swimming, thickened darkness that seemed to suck me into the vortex of a black whirlpool. Then, I felt suddenly sick. A horrible, grave-smelling effluvium pressed in upon me from every quarter. It was the stench of lost ages, the noisome, ectoplasmic aura of carrion-flesh.

I lit a candle and by its luminance saw in a small cleared circle, surrounded by the baleful, winking-glass anachronism of test-tubes and retorts, a statuette that seemed to have been carved from damp, half-rotten wood. I took a step forward and stared down at a form of craftsmanship that was at once exquisite and indescribably evil; I had the feeling that the hands which chiseled this thing must have been directed by some unholy genius. No human art could have wrought so uncannily perfect an image of Tam. Sprawled on its side, the miniature animal gazed into the candleglow with hideously blank eyes. There was an ugly gash in the full throat that ran from ear to ear, and from that carven wound pulsed the vile, greenish ichor that spread in a slow pool upon the scarred surface of the table!

I CANNOT say for certain how long I stood staring at that fetid, putrescent tableau of death. Disjointed, unbearable visions of the gentle animal that had come to mean so much to me infested the darkness about me. Physical illness returned, knotting my stomach, and I thought of Tam, alone somewhere, whimpering away the last of his brief life. At breakfast the next morning, the housekeeper bustled in to say that a fisherman from the village wanted urgently to speak with me. They had found Tam.

A dank mist fingered inland from the bleakness of the Atlantic. It swirled like seance-conjured ectoplasm among the dew-chilled fronds that spiked the crest of the dune. I knelt for a time beside the pitiful, limp form that lay half-covered with wind-blown sand. The rich rusty hair at Tam's throat was matted with a darker crimson stickiness. The horrid slit gaped redly, like the grotesque smile of a cretin. Tam had been dead for hours. I stood erect and the little fisherman wiped a furtive tear from the salt-burned seams of his face.

"Us at the village liked Tam, sir. He was so gentle-like with the children. . . ." He snuffled and shook his head. "Musta been a awful big beast as could make such a tear in his gullet. . . ."

I didn't say anything. I sent the little man for a spade and a length of tarpaulin. We wrapped Tam in the canvas and buried him there on the dune. The sand was damp and cold; icy mist settled in the shallow pit of the grave. When we had filled it in, I marked it with a single, bleached seashell. All the time we worked, I thought of the fisherman's words, and I knew that nothing natural, neither beast nor human, had destroyed Tam.

Father never knew the truth; I let him believe the story that circulated among the villagers—the tale of some wandering animal that had fought with Tam and killed him. I had no desire to aggravate my father's growing uneasiness in connection with Claude. He was getting on in years and had not been really well since Mother's death, and I wanted him to spend his declining days in peace.

When, shortly after dinner, I decided to retire, Claude climbed the long stairway at my side. He didn't speak but at my door he paused. Involuntarily, I looked at him. He was smiling, his pallid, mature visage an odd contrast against the boyishness of his clothes; I had seen that face before. It held the same triumphant, cruelly-humorous

smile that had been framed in the window the day the last tutor deserted Inneswich Priory. Once again, Claude Ashur's will had conquered the transgressor. After a long moment, softly, he said, "Goodnight," and walked off along the shade-slotted corridor that led to the room in the East Wing. I didn't see him again for nearly four years.

III

THE following morning, before Claude was up and about, I bade goodbye to my father, and, as I'd been planning to do for some time, left for Princeton to study journalism. For several months the darkling memory of those last hours at the Priory hovered always at the rim of consciousness, but, gradually, forgetfulness pressed the horrible fate of Tam into a cobwebbed niche of the past. My life at the university became a comfortably mundane round that was far removed from the existence I had led under the shadow of my brother at Inneswich Priory. My sole material connection with Claude during those four happily crowded years was the correspondence I carried on with Father. With the passage of time his letters grew increasingly strained; try, as he obviously did, to seem cheerful and satisfied, he could never quite keep apprehensive references to Claude from slipping into them. Those scant phrases, hinting that Claude was becoming more and more secretive and unmanageable, invariably cast me backward through endless corridors of gloom, evoking a terrible picture of the loathsome, grinning face I wanted only to forget. Then, too, beyond the transient uneasiness caused by my father's restrained messages, there were moments when I felt certain that, even here, the fetid spectre of Claude's influence could touch me. To certain more conservative elements at the university, groups that numbered among them students indigenous to Inneswich or its surrounding country, I had become an object of rather distasteful curiosity. I was avoided as "that fellow from Inneswich Priory—Claude Ashur's brother. . . ."

When Father came down to Princeton for my commencement, Claude came with him. Looking back upon that last night in my sitting room, I realize, now, that, had we not been blinded by our wish to believe something good of Claude, Father and I should have guessed at the odious truth from the beginning. As things were, we were only too anxious to accept my brother's soft-voiced, trite lecture about having decided that he could best serve humanity through medicine. Happy for the first time in years, Father drank in every syllable of Claude's blasphemous lies. Before he retired, he told me confidentially, that he would be grateful if I advised Claude on the choice of the most suitable university. It wasn't the sort of job one looked forward to; giving advice to my brother seemed like a rather pretentious idea. I was not at all sure he wouldn't laugh at me.

I returned to the sitting room to find Claude slouched in a battered leather armchair by the fireplace. Even in the roseate glow of a log-fire, his face seemed exceptionally pallid. I remember reflecting that it was as though he were suffering a blood-draining chill; a chill that went deeper than flesh to clutch the soul in icy fingers. His eyes came up quickly as I took the chair opposite him and lit my pipe. I fancied that the ancient, cryptic malevolence of the the smile he turned on me was inexplicably tinged with anxiety. It gave me rather a start, when, while I was still searching for a proper approach to the subject, he said, softly:

"I've already decided on the college, you know. . . ."

"Well. . . . No. . . . I didn't know. . . ."

"Yes. . . ." Quite suddenly the opaque cold eyes glinted with quiet cunning. In that moment I should have sensed the malefic import of Claude's choice. I confess I felt nothing but a vague uneasy puzzlement at his next words. "I've decided to go to Miskatonic University. . . ."

He spoke the name with an unusually resonant clarity, and as he did, I saw again the unwonted hint of anxiety that seethed behind his reserved smiling mask. One would have said that Claude was afraid I might recognize that name; that it bore some corrupt connotation of which he hoped I was ignorant. Almost imperceptibly, when I asked where Miskatonic was located and what sort of reputation it had, he relaxed.

In sibilant, strangely hypnotic tones, he drew a pleasant picture of a well-endowed college, abounding in charming tradition, nestled in the domed hills of Arkham, in Northern New England. He did not speak, that night, of what obnoxious horrors lay hidden within the ivy-strangled walls of the Library of Miskatonic. He told his fetching lies with brilliant ease. And, despite the warning voice of danger that had nagged me from the outset, in the end I sanctioned Claude's choice. For, watching the frozen, grinning determination of his face, I knew I could never change his mind.

THAT first year at Miskatonic was a brilliant success; Claude's grades were so far above average as to exact an enthusiastic, complimentary letter from the Dean of Men. I remember how the pallor of doubt ebbed from Father's face as he read that message; there was a child-like pride in the way he handed it to me. I myself, was inordinately pleased by this unqualified praise of Claude; the apprehension that had tortured me all that year began to melt away. Then, I read the list of subjects in which my brother had excelled, and the warm glow of the library hearth seemed to smother suddenly under an intangible, chill blanket of corruption. "Medieval Lore; Ancient Cults and Sects; History of Necromancy; Examination of Extant Literature on Witchcraft." The vile titles floated, smiling evilly, in the shadowed corners of the room. It was then that I realized the gross impudence, the monstrous significance of Claude's selection of Miskatonic University.

In his second year at Miskatonic, Claude came home for the Christmas holidays. He had been at the Priory only three days when Father suffered a sudden and irreparable relapse.

It was the argument that brought it on. I was passing the half-open library door when I heard Father's voice. I turned in at the threshold, my cold-stiffened face had already wreathed in a holiday grin; then, I stopped. They had not heard me. Father sat slumped in a chair by his reading-table; in the lamplight his mouth looked twisted, his eyes anxious. A sickly pallor coated his parchment-dry skin. Claude, his back to me, stared silently at the raw orange corpse of a dying log in the fireplace.

"Claude. . . ." My father spoke thickly, as though some insupportable burden crushed his chest. "You must try to understand. . . ."

"I understand," Claude's voice was barely audible, yet brutally hard.

"No. . . . You don't. . . ." Father waved an ineffectual, blue-veined hand. "You've got to see that I'm doing this for your own good. Yes; your mother left you some money in her will—she left equal amounts to you and your brother—but, it was put in trust, to be controlled by me, until you come of age, or . . . or, until I die . . . Claude, you must stay at Miskatonic. You. . . ."

"I tell you I'm sick of college! I've learned all I can, there. I've got to have the money! I want to travel. I want to see Tibet and China. I want to live in the Bayous and the Indies. . . ." Abruptly, Claude spun to face Father. For the first, I saw the feverish, seething hate, the uncontrollable rage in his eyes. I watched my father wilt before the power of unhuman gaze. Claude's voice rose to a demented, grinding cry. He lurched toward the cowering form in the chair. "I tell you, I've got to have that money!"

"Claude!"

As I stumbled into the room, bundles spilled from my arms. Tree-decorations crashed to the floor, splintering into myriad scarlet and green slivers. Claude stood frozen, only a few feet from the easy-chair. Terrified, prayerful relief flooded the wide eyes Father turned on me. He raised that hopeless, gentle hand as though he would speak, then suddenly sank back, death-pale and senseless, against the cushions of the chair. Choking with sick fury, I brushed past Claude, and knelt at my father's side. The pulse in his withered wrist was pitifully feeble.

"Why can't you let him be?" I said hoarsely. "Why can't you get the hell out of here, and let him alone?"

"One way or the other," he said softly, "I mean to have what I want."

Only the terrible urgency of Father's condition enabled me to struggle to sanity through the cold, throttling web of terror

Claude's words had woven. Almost before the library door closed behind my brother, I had rung Dr. Ellerby's number on the desk-'phone. He came at once. He had grown fatter and nearly bald with the passage of years, but that night, as he prescribed a sedative and several days in bed for my father, there was in his jowly, florid visage the same impotent puzzlement I had seen there the night Mother died. In a professional, matter-of-fact tone, he advised that Father should have as little excitement as possible, and all the while I could feel him thinking that, here, in this ancient Priory, throve a malady that no worldly knowledge of medicine could cure.

Doctor Ellerby called every evening; after each mechanical, forcedly-cheerful examination of his patient, he could come down to the library for a much-needed drink. I would watch the dejected slope of his shoulders, as he stood, before the casement, gazing at the winter-mauve shadows of the ash-grove. After a time, he would shake his head slowly and his voice would be heavy and beaten.

"It's so odd. I can't explain it. I've known your father ever since he came to Inneswich; he never had a blood-condition. He has none now. . . . And yet, it's as though . . . well, as though, somehow, the blood were being drained from his body. . . ."

Sometimes his words varied; their hopeless, frustrated meaning was always the same. Ellerby's tones echoed softly in some hidden corner of my brain, warping into the cold, venomous cadences of another voice. Once more I heard the brittle snapping of splintered Christmas decorations, under Claude's shifting feet. I listened as the pale spectre of him murmured that hideous warning again and again. "One way or the other, I mean to have what I want. . ."

It was on a sleet-chilled morning in mid-February that the letter arrived at Inneswich Priory. Addressed to Father, it was signed by one Jonathan Wilder, Dean of Men, Miskatonic University. The expensive bond paper rustled faintly in my trembling fingers. Apprehension rose in a gelatinous tide, clogging my lungs. It was a short letter; the sentences were cryptic and strangely self-conscious. They said little, and yet, they hinted strongly at some darkling fear that haunted the mind of the writer. Jonathan Wilder confessed that what he had to say was not meant to be committed to paper. He said he would be grateful if Father would visit him in his office on the campus at Miskatonic, so that they might discuss in private the strange circumstances which had brought about this unfortunate turn of events in the college career of his son, Claude.

Father never saw the letter. The next Saturday, I was aboard the late evening train bound for Arkham. I lay back wearily against the dusty green Pullman seat, and stared into the square of impenetrable night that was my window. I saw nothing of the spectral landscape through which the train rattled like some phosphorescent worm crawling endlessly in the subterranean darkness of a tomb. Before my burning, sleepless eyes, only the final sentence of Jonathan Wilder's message writhed in a depraved, hypnotic *danse macabre*. "Believe me, I am indeed sorry to have to inform you that, after long deliberation, the Board of Directors can see no other course. Claude Ashur has been expelled from Miskatonic University."

IV

JONATHAN WILDER was a tall, cadaverous man who tried to hide the sombre distaste in his eyes behind a blinking barrier of pince-nez. He made a bony steeple of his fingers, and, for a long time, gazed wordlessly at the barren expanses of the university campus beyond the window. His eyes studied the distant, gray coldness of hills that hemmed in Arkham; they squinted against the icy glint of winter sun on the sluggish, winding ribbon of the Miskatonic. Then, abruptly, decisively, Jonathan Wilder turned back to me. He cleared his throat.

"I do hope you'll appreciate our position in this matter, Mr. Ashur. The Board has bent over backward to be lenient with your brother; they know what a brilliant mind he has. But . . . ." He shrugged faintly, wiping the pince-nez on the sleeve of his oxford-gray coat. "The fact is, from the very beginning Claude has shown a rather

. . . shall we say, unwholesome? . . . yes . . . a decidedly unwholesome interest in subjects that are directly opposed to the concepts of medical science. He has spent virtually all his time in the University Library. . . .

"You . . . ah . . . You haven't heard about the library here at Miskatonic, Mr. Ashur? . . . No. I see you haven't. . . . Well, I might begin by saying that our library is reputed to contain the most extensive collection of forbidden and esoteric lore in existence today. Under lock-and-key, we have the only extant copies of such things as the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of von Juntz, and the loathsome *Book of Eibon*. . . . Yes, even the dreadful *Necronomicon*. . . ." I fancied that I saw an irrepressible shudder pass through Jonathan Wilder as he said those damnable names; when he spoke again, his voice was scarcely more than a whisper.

"Your brother, Mr. Ashur, has been seen to copy whole pages of that horrible lore. Once, long after closing hours, one of our librarians—a wholely reliable girl, I assure you—found Claude Ashur crouched in a shadowy corner among the bookstacks, muttering some weird incantation. She swore his face was . . . not human. . . ." The tall man drew a long shivering breath. "There are other stories, too. There have been whisperings of strange doings in your brother's lodgings in Pickham Square. People speak of foul odors and whimpering agonized voices. . . . Of course. . . ." He raised one hand palm-up. "Some of this may be conjecture; possibly it's been exaggerated. But, in any case, the tales about Claude Ashur are doing Miskatonic definite harm. Enrollment has fallen off. Students have left, midterm, without apparent reason, after a short period of friendliness with your brother. You see, the esoteric learning our library affords is all very well when assimilated by a normal mind. . . . But, a mind like Claude Ashur's. . . ." He broke off, self consciously. "Well . . . I'm sure you see my point. . . ."

"Yes," I said, slowly. "Yes . . . I see. . . ."

A MAN opened the door of Claude's house, his unfriendly, age-scared face stiffened at mention of the name.

"Mr. Ashur's out," he said flatly.

"I see. . . . Well, I'll wait in his rooms. . . ." I took a step forward and the door all but slammed in my face. The jaundiced glow of a streetlamp winked in the old man's hard, wary eyes. I got out my wallet. "It's all right. I'm his brother. . . ." He took the dollar bill without thanking me.

"Top floor." He opened the door to let me pass.

"Thanks. . . ." I paused. "By the way, Mr. Ashur will be leaving here tonight . . . for good. . . ."

I couldn't be certain, but in the dubious glare of a garish hall light, it seemed to me that the old man's face grew suddenly soft with unspoken relief. As I moved carefully upward through the Cimmerean darkness of the stairwell, I heard him mutter, "Yes, sir!" He said it with the fervor of one who was murmuring: "Thank God!"

From the moment I entered his room, I had been vaguely aware of an indefinable odor, at once sickly-sweet and stinging in the nostrils, that seemed to permeate every corner of the room. Now, I knew I had been inhaling the pungent fumes of oily pigment mixed with turpentine. For, the thing beneath the skylight was an artist's easel, and, propped on its cross-bar, hidden by a cotton veil, was what I took to be a canvas in progress. To the right of the easel stood an antique work-cabinet, it's scarred top littered with paint-clogged brushes and a pallet. Mechanically, as though driven by some mystic compulsion, I went to the table. Not until I was standing directly over it did I see the open book that lay half-buried beneath the melange of brushes and paint.

A MALICIOUS gleam from one of the lamps slanted across the tissue-fine texture of the volume-pages. A stench of immeasurable age swirled upward to me as I bent to decipher the ancient heiroglyphs that crawled like obscene insects across the paper. The book before me was one of the earliest editions of Albertus Magnus; at the bottom of the right-hand page, a single passage had been underscored. Revulsion knotted my stomach as I read those accursed lines.

". . . Three drops of blood I draw from

thee. The first from thy heart, the other from thy liver, the third from thy vigorous life. By this I take all thy strength, and thou losest the strife. . . ."

Beside this Medieval sorcerer's chant, on the wide, yellowed margin, Claude Ashur's spidery script confided: "There has been no news from the Priory, but I am certain the spell will work. The portrait is completed. Before long, I shall know victory; I shall have what I want. . . ."

I cannot say for certain what wild conjectures seethed through my mind in that instant. I only know that some instinctive, fearful hatred warped my hand into the vicious claw that ripped the veil from the painting on the easel. A terrified cry snagged in my throat, and I staggered backward, staring sickly at the festering, noisome thing my brother had created. To this day, here in the white-walled sanctuary of my asylum cell, there are hideous moments in the night when I lay horrified, on the paralytic brink of sleep, while the loathsome creatures of that canvas of the damned writhe against the dark curtains of my eyelids. I pray God no other mortal eye shall ever be seared by any such horror as I beheld that night in Pickham Square.

In the slimy colors of some subterranean spectrum, Claude Ashur had wrought cancerous images of the slobbering, gelatinous beings that lurk on the threshold of outer night. Diabolically smiling, amoebic, gangrenous creatures seethed in the shadows of that hateful canvas, and slowly, as I watched, there emerged from its crawling depths, the portrait of what once had been a man. The visage that confronted me was barely covered with discolored, maggot-eaten skin. Its blue-tinted lips were twisted in agony, and in their corrupted sockets, the eyes held a pitiful, pleading expression. Not one feature of that ruined face was whole, and yet there was something terribly familiar about it. I took an unsteady step toward the picture, then stopped. Awful suspicion reeled madly in my head as I noticed for the first the tiny scarlet globules that oozed from that decaying skin. It was as though every pore had exuded a dew of blood!

"You always were an incurable busybody, Richard. . . ."

Echoing icily in the dim corners of that low ceilinged room, the sibilant hardness of the voice seemed unreal. Only when I had turned to find Claude's angular, dark-suited figure framed in the doorway, was I certain that my confused brain wasn't playing tricks on me. There was no mistaking the malevolent reality of the half smile that curled my brother's lips. Sunken in his pallid, immobile face, onyx eyes flashed with caustic humor.

"I'm afraid my little creation gave you rather a turn," he murmured. "You know, Richard, it's always best for sensitive souls to mind their own business. . . ."

The old, impotent rage blurred my vision; Claude's venomous smile faded and grew horribly clear again. When my voice came, it was thick and ill-controlled: "You'd better do your packing, now. I've made reservations on the midnight train for Inneswich. . . ."

We reached Inneswich Priory at noon the following day. A winter storm had swept inland, and gray, needling rain made the ivy-choked walls glisten evilly. There was a fire on the library hearth; before it, Doctor Ellerby stood waiting for us. One look at his face, and the vile suspicion that had been spawned last night in that dark, narrow room, blazed into putrescent reality. In that instant, I knew who had been the subject of the hellish portrait in Pickham Square. I knew my father was dead.

Claude made no display of pretended grief. He made no secret of his eagerness to have the will settled. There was whispering in the village; the simple, superstitious people of Inneswich spoke of daemons and the consorts of hell who could laugh in the face of Death. My brother's terrible, inhuman cheerfulness became a festering legend muttered by witch-hunting nonagenarians. Only the brave, the few who had been closest to the Church and my father, attended the lonely burial service, and even they departed in haste, glancing apprehensively backward at the figure of Claude Ashur, black against the bleak and threatening sky. Two weeks after the interment, one week after the reading of the will, Claude cashed a check for the full amount of his monetary inheritance and disappeared.

YOU can make a religion of escape. You can run away from the memory of horror, and hide yourself in willful forgetfulness. You can fill your life with feverish activity, that crowds out the shadows of diseased evil. I know. I did just that for nearly eight years. And, in a certain measure, I succeeded. Having acquired a modest, white-stuccoed cottage on the outskirts of a southern Jersey resort, I divided my time between it and the Priory. I made new friends. I forced myself to mingle with worldly society as I'd never done before. After a time, I was able to resume my neglected literary career. I told myself I had escaped. Actually, I was never able to pass that carven, padlocked door in the East Wing without having to suppress a nauseous chill. There were still moments when, alone in the dusk-dimmed library, I broke into a cold sweat and Claude Ashur's voice echoed demoniacally in the shadowed corners of the room. At worst, however, these terrible sensations were transient illnesses that could be cured by friendly laughter or concentrated creative work. Somewhere, I knew, the malign genius of my brother still existed, but I hoped and slowly grew to believe that he had passed out of my life forever. I never spoke his name. I knew and wanted to know nothing about him. Only once, in all those years, did I have any direct news of Claude.

By a lucky chance my first book excited friendly interest among certain groups, and I found myself on the invitation lists of the literati. I attended countless cocktail parties and dinners, and it was at one such soiree that I met Henry Boniface. He was a small man, almost effeminate, with a sandy top-knot and straggling beard to match. He shook my hand timidly, but I fancied a sudden brightness in his pale eyes as he repeated my name. I wanted to get away from him. Thinking of what my hostess had said of Henry Boniface as she guided me toward him through the crowd, I felt a sudden oppressive apprehension close in upon me. He was a surrealist painter who just returned from the West Indies, and, a few years back, he had taught at Miskatonic University.

"Ashur," his soft, persistent voice murmured. "But, of course! I knew I'd heard that name!" That odd, brilliant interest blinked in his eyes again. "You must be Claude Ashur's brother. . . ."

For years no one had referred to me in that manner. The loathesome phrase whispered in my head maliciously. Claude Ashur's brother. The sound of it seemed to throw open some tremendous portal within me; all the ancient deliberately forgotten terror swelled in my chest like a rising, slimy tide. "Yes," I said thickly. "That's right. . . ."

It seemed to me that Boniface's gaze narrowed, biting into my face. His tone was light, diffident, but mercilessly probing. "I suppose you haven't heard from Claude in some time? No. I daresay not. Well, in that case, I have a bit of news for you. . . ."

I wanted to tell him to shut up, to quit opening old cancerous sores with his rotten chatter. I only stared at him.

"Yes. . . . The fact is, I heard about Claude while I was in the Indies. Amazing. He was always a most amazing fellow. I knew him quite well while he was at Miskatonic. He was in one of my art classes. Said he wanted to learn to paint so that he could do some sort of portrait. . . ."

Cold beads of perspiration coated my palms. The worm-eaten monstrosity of Pickham Square reeled evilly in my brain. Henry Boniface droned on.

"But, to get back to the Indies. The blacks there told me of a white man who was living in the back-country among their witch-doctors, studying voodoo. Seems he'd wormed his way into their confidence. He'd been admitted into the cult and took part in all those repulsive doings at the *humfortt*. They . . . ah . . . They said his name was Claude Ashur. . . ." Boniface shook his tiny head slowly. "Amazing. Extraordinary fellow, indeed. What strikes me is how he can go on living there in immunity. He was never what you'd call robust, was he? And there are all sorts of horribly fatal diseases in the back-country. . . . It's a miracle he's alive. . . ."

I felt a hard smile curl the stiffness of my lips. "Don't worry about Claude," I said bitterly. "He has a tremendous will to live. Nothing will kill him. . . ."

The words fell flat and cold between us, and after a moment of awkward silence, I

excused myself, leaving Henry Boniface to stare after me with those bird-bright, curious eyes. I never saw him again, but more than once in the horror-ridden years that followed, my mind reached back through limitless dark to the night I uttered that damnable prophecy. "Nothing will kill him." Had I realized then the corrupt truth of those words, I might have saved Gratia Thane—and myself. I might have destroyed Claude Ashur before he was beyond destruction.

Early in October, 1926, I returned once more to the monastic quiet of Inneswich Priory, intending to pass the winter there, and complete the last chapters of my second book. After so extended a period of freedom from my brother's influence, the Priory had to all intents and purposes reverted to kind. It had become again the sequestered, peaceful home I had known in early childhood. Settled down to work, living comfortably but simply, I was almost happy. My second novel was never finished. Less than a month after my arrival at the Priory, I received the letter:

> My dear Richard:
>
> I know that you had hoped never to hear from me again. I'm indeed sorry to disappoint you. But, the fact is, the prodigal has grown weary of wandering, and is ready to come home. And, much as you might dislike the idea, you can't deny your devoted brother his right to live in the ancestral manse, can you? Be so good as to prepare one of the better bedchambers, Richard. The blue one in the West Wing would be ideal. For, you see, I'm not returning as I left—alone. I'm bringing home my bride.

IN THE week that followed the arrival of Claude's letter, the news had spread with awesome rapidity, and fear had flowered anew in the shadows of Inneswich, blooming like some malignant cancer whose growth had been hidden for a while, but never checked. Wild conjecture muttered from street to street. Who was this creature Claude Ashur had married. What could she be like? There were predictions that murmured of a woman of strange and evil beauty; there were hints at a reincarnation of the hell-spawned witch Jabea Dreisen had burned at the stake more than a century ago. Long before they had ever seen her, the people of Inneswich were haunted by an abject fear of my brother's life. I too was growing strangely fearful of the nameless woman who was Claude's bride. I had finished the sixth brandy before I sprang to my feet at the sound of a car turning into the Priory drive.

Memories of that night have always returned to me in fitful, nightmarish segments, haunting impressions that flash brilliantly in some secret crevice of the brain then fade once more into the cloying yellow mist of remembered horror. I hear again the metallic summons of the wrought-iron knocker echoing through the darkened halls of the Priory. I recall a faint rustle of clothes and the housekeeper's awed murmur: "Mister Richard is in the library." I remember turning to face the door. Then, Claude Ashur stood on the threshold. He had changed. He seemed taller than when last I'd seen him. The aquiline face was paler and more emaciated, and yet it had taken on a certain regularity of feature that made it handsome in a striking, sardonic way. Claude, as I remembered him, had always been pointedly negligent of his attire. Now, his expensive, well-cut tweeds, soft-collared shirt and knitted tie were in the best of taste. He moved easily across the room toward me; his hand in mine was abnormally cold. He smiled.

"Richard, old man! It's been a long time!"

The casual heartiness of his tone gave me a start. In that moment, I decided that, if Claude had lived in the hideous back-country of the Indies, he had also spent some time in Europe. For that sibilantly powerful voice had taken on a very definite Continental cadence. He spoke with a faintly Germanic accent.

"Sorry we're so late. The trains, you know. They're always so . . ." He must have seen that I wasn't listening; my gaze had gone beyond him to the library doorway. His face vaguely puzzled, he turned, and then smiled again. "Ah . . . Gratia, my dear. . . ."

I had never seen anyone like Gratia Thane. Her face was a softly squared oval

framed by wind-blown auburn hair that emphasized the soft whiteness of her skin. A hesitant smile touched the corners of full, perfectly-rouged lips, and as she came nearer, I saw that the rather wide-set eyes were sloe-black and strangely docile. The traveling tweeds she wore couldn't conceal the exquisite grace of her carriage. She stood only a few feet from me, now. Her eyes had not left my face for a moment. As though from a great distance, I heard Claude's quiet laughter.

"Well, my dear? Aren't you going to say 'hello' to Richard?"

As the dark eyes swung slowly to meet Claude's, they underwent a remarkably subtle change. In the flickering amber glow of the fire, they seemed to grow suddenly warmer; they caressed Claude's face with a kind of hypnotic, voiceless adoration. Only when my brother had given her a barely perceptible nod of assent, did Gratia turn back to me. I took her extended hand in mine. When she spoke, her voice was throaty and beautifully modulated, but she said the words with the diffident air of a little girl who has learned her lesson well.

"I've been looking forward to meeting you, Richard. . . ."

I cannot recall my mumbled reply. I know that the moment those warm, soft fingers touched mine an unwonted, boyish confusion swelled in my throat. For a time, I only stared at the loveliness of Gratia Thane, and then, suddenly realizing that I had held her hand too long, I let it go. I think I flushed. I was conscious of Claude's steady scrutiny of my face, and when I looked at him, I saw the tight, malicious curl of his lips. All the old, corrupt malevolence was in that smile. I knew, then, that despite his Continental manner, Claude Ashur hadn't really changed.

The dinner was not a success. I was frightened. It was strange, selfless fear that turned cold inside me, as I sat, pretending to eat, and studied Gratia Thane. Time and again, I saw that childlike devotion soften her lovely face; she never failed to smile when Claude chanced to look her way. It was a gentle, worshipping smile, and still, the longer I watched it, the more convinced I was that it was a mask—a mask that could not quite hide the mute, unutterable weariness that crept into her eyes in unguarded moments. I was no longer afraid of my brother's wife; I was afraid *for* her. I was haunted by the feeling that, somehow, the subtle, cancerous evil that had followed Claude Ashur since birth was reaching out its vile, slime-coated tentacles to claim this girl, to destroy her as it had destroyed everything it ever touched. And, quite suddenly, I knew I didn't want that to happen. I didn't want anything to happen to Gratia. She was the loveliest woman I had ever known.

After Claude and Gratia had climbed the wide staircase, disappearing into the gloom of the upper hallway I didn't retire immediately. I went back to the cold hearth and poured myself a stiff drink from the decanter. The liquor didn't warm me. I felt tired and confused, but I knew that if I went to bed, I wouldn't sleep. I don't know how long I sat slumped in the chair by the lifeless grate. I lost count of the drinks I poured. I lost touch with everything but the pale, frightened image that floated before my closed eyes—the image of Gratia Thane.

THE shadow-shrouded corners of the room closed in upon me, and through the French casements seething, icy fog swirled as though no earthy barrier could stop it. Terror clutched at my chest as, slowly, out of the blinding, jaundiced mist there emerged two wavering figures. Horror warped Gratia's face, wrenching all beauty from it. Her lips parted as though she would scream, but, no sound came. Madly she stumbled through the scum-coated labyrinths of outer darkness, and at her heels, its saturnine laughter shrieking in her ears, ran the swollen, slime-dripping thing that was Claude Ashur. The running feet thrummed rhythmically, like the sacrificial drums of some demon-worshipping tribe. Nearer, they beat. Nearer. Nearer.

I thought I was still dreaming. Cold sweat-beads crawled from the hair in my armpits along the sides of my body. My hands trembled. My eyes were open. Gradually, the familiar, shadowy objects of the library came into focus. But, the hellish throbbing of those ceremonial drums did not stop! For one horrible moment, I doubted my own sanity. Then, slowly, pain-

fully, my numbed limbs obeyed the orders of my brain. I stumbled unsteadily to the darkened threshold of the library, and, clutching at the door for support, I knew that what I heard was no product of a diseased imagination. No one could deny the ghastly reality of the rhythmic sound that swelled like some obscene heartbeat in the blackness of the stairwell.

It came from the chamber in the East Wing. Even before my uncertain legs had carried me up the endless hill of the stair, I knew where I was going. With each step the demoniac thrumming grew louder, crashing madly against the walls of the high, narrow corridor that led to the East Wing. My lips were dry; breath made a rasping sound in my throat. For an incalculable moment, I stood staring at the rust-coated padlock that hung open on the latch of that hateful, carven portal. The doorknob was cold in my clammy grasp. The heathen tattoo of the drums exploded like thunder against my eardrums, as the door swung inward without a sound.

My brother, seated cross-legged on the floor with his back to the door, was swathed in the folds of a scarlet cloak. It was his bloodless hands, stretched outward, to the slimy skins of weirdly-painted native tom-toms, that beat out that hypnotic rhythm of the damned. In an ancient sacrificial brazier which stood between him and Gratia, glowed the blue-white flame that was the only light in the room; with each turgid heart-throb of the drums, the tongue of fire hissed and flared to unholy brightness. And, in that eerie, pulsating luminescence, I saw the change that had come over Claude's bride.

The pallid face that seemed to float in a phosphorescent nimbus was no longer that of Gratia Thane. The soft oval had grown suddenly angular; wan, dry skin stretched tautly over high cheek-bones. The eyes I remembered as wide and innocent had sunken into shadow-tinged sockets and turned oddly bright and crafty. Her mouth was a thin, bloodless gash that curled bitterly at the corners. It was a face that tainted the virginal loveliness of her white-gowned body. And, even as I watched, the horrible change grew more and more profound. At every thud of the tom-toms, wiser, subtler evil gleamed from those wary eyes.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, while I stood horror-frozen in the doorway, the erotic thrumming had been muted. Now, above the distant rumbling, there rose a thin, godless wail that was more animal than human. Alien syllables, tumbling from Claude Ashur's parted lips, burst in the gloom like poisonous tropical flowers; the unholy tones of his incantation flowed through the stagnant air like pus that drained from a lanced abscess.

I saw the face that had been Gratia's grow tense. A caustic, horribly familiar grin warped the lips, and slowly, as a snake weaves to the mesmeric rhythm of the charmer's pipe, the firm white body swayed in time with the ghastly threnody Claude Ashur chanted. Then, abruptly, the shrill wild voice rose, and strangely accented but recognizable words trembled in the putrescent shadows of the room.

"Be gone, O will more frail than mine! Be gone, and leave me room! Gratia Thane is cast out, and this flesh belongs to me! Through these eyes shall I see; through these fingertips shall I feel. Through these lips I shall speak! Speak! Speak!"

The furious command whined coldly above the drums. The flame in the brazier snapped and leapt high. And, staring into its blue-white depths, Gratia was suddenly still. Only pale lips moved in the expressionless mask of her face. The voice that came was calm and sibilant; it was the soft voice of a man who spoke with just the hint of a Germanic accent!

"This body is mine. Henceforth, this flesh is the house of my spirit. Claude Ashur. I am Claude Ashur! I am! I . . ."

"Gratia!" Her name was an anguished cry in my fear-dried throat.

"Claude . . ." The bewildered murmur trembled on Gratia's lips. The hideous gauntness, the unhealthy eye-shadows had faded from her face, leaving it flushed and gentle. Her gaze moved slowly from Claude to me, and the frightened puzzlement behind her warm, dark eyes was that of a child awakened in a strange room. "Richard . . . Where are we? What's happened? I feel so weak. I . . ."

Her voice trailed off in a husky sigh; the

tenseness drained from her body. The filmy white gown rustled faintly as she slid forward to the floor and lay still. I was the first to reach her. Her hand was icy in mine and coated with a clammy dew. I think I whispered her name and cradled her in my arms. Then, I became conscious of the shadow that was Claude Ashur looming over us.

"I'll take care of my wife, Richard." The familiar, stony calm had returned to his voice. I stared up into the colorless mask that was his face. In the glow of the guttering brazier-flame, it seemed to me that his pallid skin was spotted with faint, brownish blotches. I said thickly:

"We'd better get a doctor. . . ."

"She'll be all right. . . ."

"But . . ."

"She's only fainted," Claude said levelly. "She needs rest. I'll take her to her room. . . ."

AS HE passed me, the cool whiteness of Gratia's gown whispered against my hand. I listened to the funereal murmur of his tread moving away down the corridor. Bewildered fear shuddered within me at each breath I drew. I wanted a drink. I stood staring into the phosphorescent glow of the brazier. A confused impulse to get to a telephone and call Dr. Ellerby swelled in me and died. I didn't move. Somewhere, in the seething tenebrosity of that chamber a hateful echo grew suddenly shrill and distinct. I heard again the sibilant, accented voice that had spoken with Gratia Thane's lips. ". . . This flesh is the house of my spirit. Claude Ashur. I am Claude Ashur."

I started violently at the sound of his laughter. Turning, I saw him standing once more on the threshold of that loathsome chamber. The tawny facial stains I had noted before were very pronounced, now; his face was scarcely more than a skull enshrouded by dry, unpigmented skin, and he seemed to breathe with difficulty. But, his rage had subsided into bland secrecy again. The old, cat-like smile had come back. The brilliant eyes laughed mirthlessly.

"Poor Richard. Really, you must learn not to intrude if you're going to continue being your old squeamish self. . . ." There was an undercurrent of warning in the bantering tone. It stirred boiling coals of anger that seared across the chilled numbness of my terror. I had a fleeting vision of Gratia's weary, child-like face. Fury made my voice harsh.

"What are you doing to her, Claude?"

He didn't answer immediately. He sank into the chair Gratia had occupied, and, for a long moment, did nothing but stare into the white-hot heart of the dancing flame. I saw the smile rebend his lips; an obscene light flickered in the shadowed depths of his eye-sockets.

"She's really quite exquisite, isn't she?" he said softly.

I said: "She's decent. She's a fine person and you're doing something to her. I want to know what's behind all this rotten display. . . ."

"Do you?" The seering gaze flashed up to meet mine. "Do you really, Richard? Are you sure you want to know? Are you sure it wouldn't offend your tender sensibilities?

"The lovely lady has inspired you, my dear Richard. She's made you a knight in shining armor." Abruptly, the lips drew into a taut line. "If I were you, I'd give up the notion of 'rescuing' the lady Gratia. You see, what you so vulgarly refer to as a 'rotten display' is really a scientific experiment. Gratia is my assistant. I've no intention of giving her up. She's the perfect subject. Perhaps that's because she's so completely in love with me. . . ."

Claude must have sensed the revulsion that shuddered through me at the foul suggestiveness of his tone. The taunting smile returned and he nodded slowly.

"Yes. My wife is quite devoted, Richard. That's why my experiments have been so successful. You see, I believe that, under proper conditions, a will that is powerful enough can take over the body of another person—transplanting its dominant personality in fresh soil, as it were—forcing the other person to exchange bodies with it. It requires only concentration and a suitable subject; one that is highly susceptible to the will of the experimenter. . . ." Claude's eyes had grown maniacally bright as he spoke. Now, he breathed each word as though it were some heathen incantation. "I've found that subject. . . ."

"You can't," I said dully. "You can't do this to Gratia. She's lovely. She . . ."

"That's just the point!" Claude's voice was a feverish whisper. "Lovely! She's the most beautiful creature I've ever seen. Think, Richard! Think what I could do with such loveliness. Think of a woman possessed of such beauty, and of my personality, my brain directing that beauty! A woman such as that could rule any man . . . a million men . . . an empire . . . a world!"

I struggled to keep my voice level. "I tell you, you can't do it. I won't let you. I know your 'experiments'. I know what they did to Father and Tam! Well, you're not going to hurt Gratia. Either you'll let her alone or I'll go to the police!"

"No, Richard," he said softly. "You won't go to the police. In a little while, you'll grow calm; you'll think. And, then, you'll realize the truth of what I told you about Gratia. She is entirely mine. She would never support any insane stories you might tell the authorities. On the contrary, if you should talk, she would readily agree with my testimony that you were quite mad."

He went out, closing the door soundlessly behind him.

VI

THERE was nothing I could do. Like an outsider, I stood by and watched while Claude Ashur's malignant genius slowly, inevitably reclaimed Inneswich Priory. By the end of the first week, I had grown to feel like some helpless intruder who has stumbled upon unspeakable horror and dares do nothing but turn his back. My nerves were like the strings of a sensitive instrument, keyed to the breaking point. Day by day I watched Gratia move through the gloom-infested hallways of the Priory; I saw the growing pallor of her gentle face; I saw the sickly fear that lurked behind the shallow mask of her eyes. Time and again, I set out upon walks that I meant to end in the local constabulary, but, I could never escape the horrible rationality of Claude's warning.

In the night, I would start awake, trembling on the brink of mad rage, as the pulsing of drums thundered through the cavern of the house; always, after such nights, there was a marked improvement, a new vitality in my brother, and Gratia seemed more wan, more silent than ever. I knew that the girl who drifted, wraithlike, from room to room, smiling obediently, adoringly at Claude, was not the real Gratia. I was convinced that she was controlled, that her voiceless devotion to Claude was a manifestation of some hideous form of mesmerism. But, I had no way of proving my theory. It is probable that I should never have known the real Gratia Thane, had it not been for the fever.

It came upon Claude quite suddenly toward the middle of the third week. The day had been overcast and unpleasantly cold; a sea-dampness had seeped into the massive Priory rooms, settling upon them a chill that no fire could dispel. Claude had spent the afternoon locked in his East Wing chamber, and when he appeared for dinner, it occurred to me that his wan face was tinted with an unwonted flush; his eyes were red-rimmed and oddly ill-at-ease when they chanced to meet mine. More than once during the oppressive silent course of the meal I saw Gratia's worried gaze seeking his. He didn't look at her. Directly after dinner, he retired.

It was well past midnight before I drifted into a fitful doze; for hours, I had puzzled over the strange silence of my brother. Since that first night of his return, the evil in Claude had grown into a bold, bantering thing that throve on barbed innuendo and secret, poisonous laughter. I wondered what had caused the change. The answer came in the form of a misty presence that floated at my bedside, like some troubled spirit. I think I must have cried out at the touch of a cool hand on my arm, for soft fingertips pressed warningly against my lips. Breathing heavily, I stared up into the moon-washed loveliness of Gratia Thane's face.

"Richard . . ." There was a timid urgency in her throaty whisper. "Richard, you must come. . . . I'm afraid. . . . I . . ." She fought to still the trembling of her lips. "It's Claude I heard him moaning. It was horrible. He's in his bedroom . . . and he won't let me in. . . . I'm afraid, Richard, he's ill. . . . I feel it. . . . We . . . we've got to do something for him. . . ."

As I watched the wide darkness of Gratia's eyes, heard the mixture of anxiety

and terror that throbbed in her voice, an odd thrill of hope shot through me. The girl who stood by my bed in that moment was no longer the will-less automaton I had come to know. For the first time since I'd met her, Gratia Thane was honestly, tremblingly alive. Her palm was moist against mine as we made our way through the Cimmerean blackness of the upper hall; I cannot say how long we stood before the door of Claude's bedchamber, listening, and scarcely breathing. I can only remember the sudden, terrified vise of her fingers on mine, when, from beyond the heavy oaken panels, there came a muted, agonized groan. I clutched the icy metal latch and twisted it sharply, throwing the ponderous door ajar.

The wild howl that rent the stillness then, was not one of pain; it was the vicious snarl of an outraged animal. For one terrible instant, I beheld, thrown into ghastly relief by the moonlight which lay in a slimy pool upon Claude's bedstead, the fever-bright eyes, the blotched skin, the raw scar-of-a-mouth that had uttered that fury-torn cry. I heard Gratia gasp. Then, violently, Claude Ashur turned from us, twisting in the bed until we could see nothing but the frail mound of his body beneath the covers.

"Get out! Get out of this room and stay out!"

"Claude . . . you're ill. . . . You've got to let us help you. . . ." Gratia took a hesitant forward step.

"Stay away from me!" the voice commanded in a harsh whisper. "I told you not to come in here. I want to be left alone!"

I said levelly: "You'd better let me call Ellerby, Claude."

"No! I don't need a doctor! I don't need anyone! It's nothing, I tell you. Just a recurrence of a fever I had in the tropics. It'll pass. Just leave me alone! Alone!"

It was no different in the morning. Despite his wife's repeated entreaties, Claude stubbornly refused to let anyone enter his room. I stood by, silent, listening while Gratia begged him to be reasonable—to call in a doctor. He spoke only once in a quiet, desperate voice. He instructed her to have his food left on trays outside the door; he told her everything would be quite all right in a few days. After that, there was no answer to Gratia's anxious pleadings. There was only an occasional soft rustling beyond the bolted door, and the nauseous odor of putrefaction that seemed to grow more foul by the minute. As he always had, Claude Ashur won. We left him alone. The door to his hateful sanctuary remained closed for more than a week, and, as time passed, I began to entertain a strange hope that at once horrified and thrilled me. I began to wonder how it would be if that door never opened again.

That week was a jungle flower that blossomed with pitifully brief magnificence in the midst of a fungus-choked swamp of evil. It was the only beautiful thing born of those final hideous days at Inneswich Priory. It was a brilliant tender touch of normalcy caught in a cesspool of malignant madness. For, in those few hours, I came to know the true Gratia Thane. Set free of the vile will that lay prisoner in that upper chamber, she became the girl I'd always known she must be; a gentle creature, full of gay laughter, and quiet tenderness; a carefree child who loved to run along the white stretches of the beach with the salt air brushing her cheek, and ruffling the bronze softness of her hair; a Gratia who, despite the lingering shadow of Claude Ashur, soon endeared herself to those villagers she chanced to meet on the evening walks that became our habit. It was as though some dark curtain that had separated her from reality, that had let her see only Claude, had been lifted. And, watching the lovely aliveness of her face, listening to her warm laughter, feeling the excitement of her hand in mine, I knew that I was in love with my brother's wife.

THE curtain fell again. As suddenly as I had found Gratia, I lost her. On the evening of the ninth day, Claude reclaimed his bride. Gratia and I had been playing backgammon in the library window seat; I remember the way the dying amber rays of the sun glinted in her eyes when she laughed almost tenderly at my run of ill-luck. And, I remember how the laughter died, so abruptly, so completely. I looked up from the game and saw the blood drain from the warm mounds of her cheeks; the dark wells of her eyes grew suddenly shallow and secretive; her pallid lips moved, but no words

came. A faint sibilant rustle made me start and turn my head. And, then, I saw it—standing in the gloom that shrouded the library threshold—the smiling, animated corpse that was Claude Ashur.

In that wasted visage, only the curled gash of the mouth and the pitted blazing eyes gave testimony to the corrupt flame of life that still burned within that fleshless body. The dry, achromatic skin of the massive forehead seemed swollen, and the hairline had receded markedly. The unwholesome brown splotches had disappeared, leaving the facial flesh seamed and sallow. A heavy, dark-colored scarf was muffled about his throat, and, (oddest of all, I thought), pale, kidskin gloves covered his hands. From that day forward, I never saw Claude without them.

"Well!" The twisted lips scarcely moved, but his soft, insinuating voice held all the old malicious humor. "This is a most touching little domestic scene. . . ." Shifting in their sockets, the seering pin-points of fire ate into the wan softness of Gratia's face. "I'm sure Richard has been a charming substitute, my dear, but really . . . Shouldn't you be just a bit more enthusiastic about your husband's recovery?"

With the hypnotic grace of a delicately-wrought puppet, Gratia rose from the window-seat; her pale hand brushed against the game-board, and several scarlet backgammon pieces spilled to the carpet. She didn't notice them. Slowly, she crossed the dusk-dimmed room to where Claude stood. Her firm, bare arms went about his neck and, passionately, she kissed the ugly wound that was his mouth. For a long time, they stood embracing in the shadows, and all the while, over Gratia's shoulder, my brother's evil face smiled at me. That night, I heard the drums again.

I thought I'd had a nightmare. A moment before, the demoniac thrumming had been pounding against my eardrums, throbbing in the depths of the nighted Priory. But, when I started up from my sweaty pillow, peering into the dark that swarmed in upon me, abruptly, the sound was gone. I sat forward, taut and waiting. The silence was profound, limitless; the silence of the tomb. It was as though some titanic heartbeat had been suddenly stilled. I tried to relax. I passed a clammy hand over my forehead, and attempted a laugh. There was nothing but a dry rasping in my throat. Determinedly, I lay back; I told myself I was letting my nerves get the better of me.

It didn't work; the longer I lay there, forcing my icy hands to stillness, listening tensely to every silken, uncertain whisper of the night, the more conscious I became of the caul of impending danger that had spread its slimy veil over Inneswich Priory. The silence was unnatural; it was the seething quietness of the demented killer before he strikes. Cursing my nerves, I threw back the counterpane and struggled into robe and slippers. Clammy air swirled about my bare ankles as I opened the bedroom door and ventured warily into the Stygian gloom of the corridor. Instinctively, I turned in the direction of the East Wing. Through the single massive casement of the upper hall, moonlight fell, making a pale, shadow-latticed desert of the floor. It was as I passed through that livid pool of moonglow that I saw her.

"Gratia!"

She seemed not to hear; as she came toward me from the shadows, her white gown murmured. It was like the warning hiss of a poisonous snake. I stared at the hueless angularity of her wasted face. The deep-set eyes burned into mine and the narrow slit that was her mouth twisted in a sardonic smile. Her tongue, pink and strangely pointed, flicked out to moisten dry lips. The mouth worked.

"Kill!" it whispered in the accented, venomous voice that didn't belong to Gratia Thane. "I must kill. . . . It's the only way. . . . The sure way. . . . He could cause trouble. . . . It's best this way. . . . Yes. . . . He must be destroyed. Killed. . . . Kill! Kill! Kill!"

I caught her wrist as a knife slashed downward toward my chest; razor-edged steel grazed my left cheek; I felt blood trickle along my jaw. It wasn't easy to hold her; she struggled with a vicious strength that was out of keeping with the fragility of her body . . . with the power of a desperate madman. The colorless lips curled back from her teeth.

"You!" she hissed. "I must kill you! Kill! Destroy! Silence forever!"

"Gratia!" I shook her violently. "Stop it! You hear me? Cut it out!"

There was the flat, brutal slap of my hand across her hysteria-twisted face, and suddenly, she was still. Insane anger melted into bewilderment; her eyes widened and gained warmth and depth; the shadows faded. Gratia's lips, pink and moist, trembled. For an instant, she could only stare; her terrified gaze moved from the flesh-wound of my face to the glinting blade of the knife she still held. She gasped. I saw her fingers open convulsively; the knife thudded to the floor. Again, our eyes met, and then she was in my arms.

"Richard. . . . Rick, I didn't mean to. . . . I didn't know what I was doing. . . . He made me. . . . It was the drums . . . and his voice. . . . Here . . . here in my head. . . ."

The fresh perfume of her hair was in my nostrils; her cheek brushed mine. Gently, she was wiping the blood from my face with the sleeve of her gown.

"It's all right," I murmured. "It's all right, now. . . ."

I held her close again; her body was trembling. She cried. It was the soft, bewildering cry of a little girl.

"I'm scared. Rick, I'm so scared! He's doing something to me. . . . He's . . ." She shook her head frantically and clung to me. "Don't let him. . . . Please. . . . You won't let him! Promise you won't let him. . . ."

"No." My voice sounded flat and hard in my own ears. "He won't hurt you. . . . He won't hurt you ever again. . . ."

"The triumph of true love!"

BITTER, weighted with sarcasm, the softly spoken words seemed to tear Gratia from my arms. Standing on the edge of the shadows, his eyes slitted in their blue-black wells, the desicated flesh of his face more livid than ever in the moonlight, Claude Ashur laughed.

"You can't have her. You know that, don't you, Richard? I've tried to be patient with you; but, I'm afraid you've interfered once too often. You see, Gratia is more than a woman and wife to me. She's my very life; my one hope of survival. I'll never let you take that hope from me. . . ."

He had begun to move slowly toward me through the moonlight; each stride had a fluid, evil grace that was almost feline. The brilliant gaze flashed to where Gratia stood, then back to me. Again, briefly, that loathsome smile toyed with the corners of his mouth.

"You don't quite understand, do you, my dear brother? You're wondering how Gratia could be my sole hope of survival. No matter. It's better that you never know. We don't want to trouble your sensitive mind on your last night in this life. Indeed, no! We want you to be at peace. We want you to be ready—for death!"

What happened then I cannot clearly remember; the murderous violence of those few minutes returns only in disparate snatches. I recall the maniacal force of Claude's lunge, the cold, bony vise of his fingers closing on my windpipe. I think I heard Gratia scream. That pale, hateful face was horribly close to mine; his putrid breath hissed, hot against my skin. I remember crashing backward under the impact of his charge. Darkness and moonlight spun in my head. I thought my lungs would burst. Then, by some desperate, instinctive twist of the body, I was free. Wind rasped in my chest. I had Claude crushed between me and the damp stone wall. My fingers clamped in his hair, jolting his head forward and back viciously. When his skull pounded against the stone for the third time, his frenzied grasp relaxed. He slid to the floor at my feet, twitched once, and was still.

He wasn't dead. With the brilliant eyes shuttered by blank, purplish lids, the pale waste of his face had every aspect of death, but, under my searching hand, his evil heart still pounded feebly. Mechanically, possessed of a strange, decisive calm, I bound him hand and foot with the heavy sash-cords of the window-drapes. I carried him to his room and laid him on the huge antique bedstead. I locked him in.

Gratia had stopped crying, but her hand was cold and trembling in mine as we descended through chill darkness to the library. I talked, then; I told her gently that there was nothing more to be afraid of; I said it was all over now. I built a fire and poured drinks for both of us. And, the whole time, a single, inescapable thought coursed with harrowing persistence beneath my outward calm. I knew that, for the safety of every-

one concerned, there was only one place for Claude Ashur: the State Asylum for the Criminally Insane. When I had finished my drink, I made two telephone calls. I asked Dr. Ellerby and the police to come to Inneswich Priory as quickly as possible.

VII

IT WAS all handled very quietly. None of the facts got into the papers. The few reporters whose editors sent them to cover the trial were refused admission. They returned, disgruntled, to their respective phone booths and dictated brief, barren items that only hinted at the abominable truth; these articles, if printed at all, were mercifully swallowed by some obscure corner of an inner page. For a while, the newspaper men tried another angle. They spent a good deal of time in the Tavern at Inneswich; they asked questions. They learned nothing. The people of the village, perhaps out of respect for the memory of my father, met all inquiries with a cold stare and locked lips. So, the loathsome secret of Inneswich Priory, the shame that had scummed the name of Ashur, remained hidden beyond a barrier of clement silence.

The only formal charge against Claude Ashur was one of assault with intent to kill. I stood in the witness box and muttered the details of his attempt on my life. That was all I had to do. The alienists did the rest. It wasn't difficult. It was simply a matter of subjecting Claude to countless cross-examinations; of recording the awed, reluctant testimony of various villagers who knew of my brother's "oddity"; of questioning the timid, uneasy man who was Dean of Men at Miskatonic University, and reading a letter from one Henry Boniface, who had taught Claude Ashur to paint.

The strange, exalted manner in which Claude accepted father's death was brought to light, and, in the end, I admitted the story of that odious portrait in Pickham Square, and the murder-incantation of Albertus Magnus. In mid-September, 1925, the alienists reached a decision. They declared my brother incurably insane.

On that last day of his examination, I went alone to the State Asylum; alone, I felt the final, brutal impact of his hate-filled, unblinking stare, and glimpsed again the cold anger of the calculating mind that lay hidden behind that emaciated mask. He showed no signs of hysteria or violence. Between white-coated attendants, he walked quietly to the doorway of the consultation room. Then he turned, and, for an instant, his face gray in the gloom of a rainy afternoon, the features somehow broadened and blurred, he was again the old, cynically smiling, indestructible Claude.

"You mustn't suppose that you've won, Richard," he said softly. "You mustn't delude yourself. They can lock me up. They can bolt doors and bar windows. But they can never imprison the real Claude Ashur. I'll be free again. Some day, somehow, I'll reach out to you—to you and my devoted wife. Sooner or later, I'll have my revenge." His muted laughter whispered through tight lips. "You don't believe that, now. But you will. Wait, Richard. . . . Just wait, and see. . . ."

I tried to listen to the quiet reassurances of the doctors; I saw my brother disappear around a bend in the corridor; I heard a door opened and closed. The metallic grind of bolts drifted back to me through the dimness. I told myself Claude had gone out of my life forever. But I didn't believe it. That last, soft-spoken warning echoed ceaselessly in my head; I had the terrible conviction that this was *not* the end of Claude Ashur.

THE semblance of contentment which settled over Inneswich Priory was a thing born of our desperate need for peace of mind. The happiness wasn't real. It was as though our determination to shut out the hideous past had pushed back a musty drapery of gloom, letting in the feeble, timorous sunlight of normalcy. In the next months, I saw Gratia slowly reclaim the young, fresh vitality I'd first known to be a part of her during the week of Claude's illness. She laughed again; she walked with me along the winter-bleak strand of the beach; she planned little surprises in the way of food delicacies; and it was she who finally convinced me that I should go back to my writing.

Had anyone asked us, I know we should have said we were quite happy. It would

have been a lie. I wrote; but the several literary articles I managed were somehow weak; they lacked spontaniety. The prose was stunted and overcast with a strange uneasiness. Gratia and I made plans. We talked of travel and marriage, but there was always a ghost of unrest that hovered between us—the knowledge that our plans could come to nothing. The realization that while that twisted, hateful creature in the asylum went on drawing the breath of life, Gratia would never be free. We were like lonely children, playing desperately at some pitiful game, trying to ignore the horror-infested night that closed slowly in on every side.

It is difficult to trace the stages by which the change overtook me. I think it began with an unwonted restlessness, that laid siege to my mind scant days after Claude had been committed to the asylum. I took to wandering, alone, along the most desolate, brine-eaten stretches of the coast; a seething uneasiness pounded mercilessly in my brain. There were horrible moments of blank detachment—moments when a wild exhilaration crawled along my spine, and I would prowl the night-dark labyrinths of the Priory, full of a sense of illimitable power. More than once I came to myself, damp with sweat, chilled, standing before that carven door in the East Wing; the door leading to the hellish tomb that housed everything that stood for the blasphemous evil of Claude Ashur.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the moment would pass, and, shaken, bewildered, I would fall across my bed, sinking into a deep, restless sleep. I never mentioned those horrible nocturnal seizures to Gratia, and yet, there were times when her eyes met mine, and I saw the half-fearful question that lurked behind her gentle gaze. She sensed that something was wrong. Her unspoken suspicions became a hideous reality the night I played the piano.

As I crossed the room and sat down on the oval bench, I told myself music might have a soothing effect on my nerves. It was only a rationalization of the sudden, inordinately passionate desire to play that had overwhelmed me. The yellowing keys were cold and slimy to the touch; my fingers moved over them with a grace, a sense of ease I had never known before. The saccharine melancholy of a Chopin Nocturne billowed into the twilit room; thrumming bass notes pulsed darkly against my hypersensitive eardrums; then, abruptly, the music was no longer Chopin's. The pounding, demented chords that trembled under my feverish touch grew cruel and malignant. Through the drumming of the bass, treble notes blended wildly into the unholy wailing of myriad lost souls. Godless rhythm crashed against shadows that writhed obscenely, keeping time. Only once before had I heard such hellish music drawn from the whining bowels of a piano. The song that shrilled beneath my fingers, now, was the chant of the damned that Gratia had played for Claude Ashur.

I knew she was behind me. My nostrils quivered tautly; the scent of her hair and skin seemed to permeate the very air of the room. My fingers stiffened and were still; the final broken wail of the music lashed out, hung like some poisonous vapor in the stillness, and died. I turned slowly on the bench, and then rose. Her sports-dress was a vivid yellow blur in the dusk-shadowed doorway; her face, the soft fullness of her lips, the ripe body that was at once chaste and subtly sensual, wavered before my burning eyes. I was before her, now, and my hand touched the warm firmness of her arm. The smile that had trembled on her lips a moment before, shadowed away. Her eyes were suddenly bright with fear. I think I smiled; I felt my lips curl, slowly, stiffly. My tongue moved, and from some vast nothingness, a voice that wasn't mine spoke through my mouth.

"Gratia, my dear . . . my bride . . . my beloved!"

Sheer, hysterical terror twisted her face as I bent to kiss her; she tore free of my hand and cringed against the wall; the words tumbled, shrill and frantically pleading, from her colorless lips.

"No! Let me alone! No. Please! You have got to let me alone!"

Somewhere in an obscure corner of my brain there was a sharp snapping sound. The stinging blur of my eyes seemed to clear abruptly, and, for the first, I actually saw the utter loathing and fear that warped Gratia's face. I felt weak; sweat trickled along

my jaw and down my neck. Fear-fraught bewilderment did tricks with my stomach. I stared helplessly at the frail creature who cowered before me, her hands covering her face. My throat was terribly dry; it made words difficult.

"What is it? . . . Gratia, what have I done? . . . What . . ."

I stopped short; she had taken her hands from before her eyes. For a long moment she only stared, puzzled, terrified; then she was in my arms, crying gently. There was a strange note of relief in the sobs that quivered through her warm body. My dull puzzlement deepened.

"What is it?" I repeated softly. "What frightened you so . . ."

"Nothing. . . ." She shook her head and a tinkle of brittle, half-hysterical laughter sounded in her throat. "Forgive me, darling. . . . I had the oddest feeling just then. . . . It must have been the music . . . his music. . . . And . . . and, your face. . . . It was so pale; the way you smiled at me . . . that crooked, rotten smile. . . . I . . ." The laughter bubbled again and broke on a sob. "It's fantastic, I know. . . . But for a minute . . . I thought you were Claude!"

VIII

I HAD not slept. The fire on my bedroom hearth had long since died to a few blood-red embers, and, well after midnight, the storm that had threatened all day had broken viciously over Inneswich.

I sat very still, strangely tense, listening, and the muttering of the sea echoed mockingly the tones of Gratia Thane: "... thought you were Claude, I thought you were Claude, Claude, Claude!" Chilled, trembling, I sprang to my feet and paced the floor aimlessly; lightning slit the blackness beyond my casement. I started and swore. My hand shook when I opened a fresh bottle of rye, and poured a stiff one. I sank into the chair again, trying to shut out the maddening chant of the surf. Time and again, in the last night-shadowed hours, I had done all these things. But, I had not slept. I was not dreaming when I heard the drums.

And, then, in some forgotten crevice of my consciousness, the unconquerable danger-signal flashed redly. No! the brain screamed, soundlessly. Don't! You can't give in! You can't let Claude win! Return! You must return . . . to yourself . . . to your own body! You must! I felt my numb lips twisting in an agonized last effort at speech.

"No!" my own voice roared hoarsely above the drums. "No! Go back! I must go back . . . must . . ."

With a tremendous effort I forced myself to stand. My legs were like jelly under me. I don't remember how I managed to stumble through the foul-smelling gloom! I remember only the door—the yawning, black rectangle of that final hope of escape—and that the hissing tongue of the flame seemed to leap higher in the brazier, stretching forth cruel, blazing fingers to hold me back. I had almost reached the threshold when it happened.

The dull, throbbing sound stabbed like a needle through my brain. The drums! I staggered and slammed into the doorjamb; leaden paralysis tangled my legs; I lurched crazily and slid to the floor. I tried to scream. It was no good. Voiceless, I careened downward through a bottomless pit of hate. And, out of the black, viscid whirlpool that swallowed me, Claude Ashur's voice wailed softly.

"Mine, Richard! I tell you, this flesh is mine! I have returned! I've come back to claim my freedom—freedom in the body that once was yours! You hear? I shall be free, and you shall be the entombed one! You, my dear brother! You!"

Babbling laughter echoed spitefully through the smothering night that welled up before my eyes; with a last frantic effort, I tried to gain my feet, then, gasping for breath, pitched forward, and lay there, utterly powerless. . . .

Through all of it, as though from some tremendous distance, some other moment of time, Claude Ashur's muted, cynical voice hissed in my ears.

"You see, Richard. . . . It wasn't hard. It wasn't hard at all. This body is mine, now. You hear? Mine! Directed by my brain, thinking my thoughts, speaking my words, doing the bidding of my will. . . ."

The blasphemous words dribbled off into whining laughter that echoed mockingly, and died along the sterile stillness of endless corridors. . . .

THE first conscious sensation was one of gnawing pain that seemed to pervade every inch of my body, eating at my flesh like some needle-fanged cannibalistic monster. With an exhausting effort, I opened my eyes. The lids felt oddly swollen, and I saw only mistily through narrow slits. The whiteness wavered before me again; I made out a whitewashed ceiling and tall, colorless walls; pallid moonlight slanted through a window on my right. I blinked and tried to bring the ghostly rectangle of the casement into better focus. Then, the razor-edged knife of terror sliced into my brain. The moonlight that seeped into that barren chamber was cut into segments by shadowy stripes; the window was reinforced—with steel bars!

A dry scream tore through my stiff, swollen lips. No! These weren't my legs; these horrible bony stilts that stretched before me, the pale skin of them bloated and desiccated, covered with suppurating brown sores! Frantically, I tore at the nightshirt that cloaked me, and then, turned violently sick. The white flesh was raw and running, as though myriad maggots had fed upon it; a foul, noisome stench stung my nostrils. Madly whimpering, I rose and staggered to the barred casement. I think I prayed. I know I was crying. And, then, reflected in window-glass made opaque by outer darkness, I saw the moon-washed horror of the face.

The thing that stared at me from the viscid depths of the casement-pane was more bestial than human. Its tremendous white forehead was swollen beyond all proportion; the thickened nose, scarred by two gaping holes of nostrils, was like nothing but the snout of a leonine animal, and below it, quivered a slavering, decayed gash that was the mouth. Sunken in the blue-black sockets, twin pin-dots of demented flame flashed evilly. There were no eyebrows, and the sweat-damp, straggling patches of hair that studded a sore-covered scalp gave it the aspect of some monstrous Medusa risen from the bowels of the sea. And, even as I watched, strangled with loathing, those corrupt lips curled slowly in a malevolent grin, and I knew that the thing before me, wreathed in that vicious smile of insane triumph, was the face of Claude Ashur!

I think I screamed. Realization flooded in upon me like a rising, slimy tide. In that moment I saw and understood the unholy motive that had lain behind the rites I had witnessed in the East Wing of Inneswich Priory. I knew, now, why my brother had wanted the body of Gratia Thane; I knew that the added power he might have gained through her beauty was only incidental. Claude Ashur had *needed* a new body. For, the flesh in which his spirit had been housed since birth was riddled with disease, tottering on the brink of the grave.

The normal, healthy body of his wife had been his only hope of survival. He had wanted it in exchange for the putrescent thing I saw, now, in the mirror of the window. And, when I had destroyed his hope of claiming Gratia's body, he had claimed *mine*, instead!

Reeling blindly to the steel-plated door, I pounded frantically at its heavy panels until the sickening pulp of those rotten hands bled. I felt these stiff lips working; I heard a voice that wasn't mine screaming from this diseased, alien throat. Words crashed wildly against the nighted stillness of the asylum.

"My brother! Claude! Find Claude! My body . . . I tell you, he's stolen my body! He's won! He's free! You've got to find him. . . . He'll destroy Gratia. . . . He'll claim her as he did me. . . . Please! You've got to let me out! I've got to stop him! Please!"

They came. They came in their white tunics and shook their heads and talked in pitying undertones. They smiled kind, wise smiles that said: The poor devil is completely mad; humor him. They strapped me to the bed and went off a bit to whisper among themselves. After a while, the gray-haired one came over to me; he had the hypodermic in his right hand. I winced as the needle plunged into the crook of my arm. The gray-haired one spoke in a lulling voice.

"You must take things more calmly, Claude. Everything is all right, but you're ill, and you must let us make you well. . . ." He smiled automatically. "You've been a very naughty boy for nearly a month now. That's why we must use the needle. I've told you many times; you must try to remem-

ber, Claude. Your brother, Richard, left the country nearly a week ago. . . ."

I shook my head dully; my tongue worked in the foul-tasting hole that was my mouth.

"Gratia?" I gasped. "Where's Gratia?"

The gray-haired one looked away; the blurred white figures of the other doctors shifted on uneasy feet and mumbled sympathetically. The hypo was beginning to take effect; the voices were only a thick murmur in my brain now. The gray-haired doctor was trying to explain something to me in the same calm tones. The words didn't reach me. But I knew what he was saying. Soft, triumphant laughter gurgled bitterly in the white void, and I knew that, wherever my brother had gone, Gratia had gone with him. I knew that Claude Ashur had won.

THERE is no longer any fear in me. Fear died with the hope of saving Gratia. I know now that I could never have won out against the infernal evil of Claude Ashur. He was, and is, too strong. Too strong for all of us. I know that at this moment, somewhere, his foul mind lives on. Perhaps he has destroyed Gratia as he destroyed me. Often I wonder how many others have met the same monstrous fate. God only knows. But we, at least, are at rest; the destroyed have come to an end of horror. There is nothing left for us to do but give warning.

People will read this and scoff; they will call it the wild scrawling of a madman on the crumbling lip of the grave. They will laugh. But it will be a nervous, sickly laughter that doesn't ring true. For in the end, when they have correlated the things I have told with the accepted facts, they will know that I am right. Claude Ashur will go on. For, strangely enough, insane as he is, I think perhaps he has captured the vagrant dream of every man—the only true immortality; the immortality of the mind that will not be imprisoned in one fleshly tomb, but will find others, and, somehow, forever escape the ravages of disease, the oblivion of the grave.

It is ironic and cruel that such a man should have made the discovery. But it is more than just that. It is dangerous. Not to me; not to Gratia and the others who have fought with Claude and lost. Nothing can touch us now. But Claude Ashur can touch you. Perhaps, even now, he is near you; perhaps he speaks with the lips of a lover, or watches through the eyes of an old and trusted friend, smiling that ancient, enigmatic smile. Laugh, if you will, but remember:

The will of Claude Ashur is possessed of a strength that goes beyond flesh and blood. One by one, it has met and vanquished every obstacle in his path. Before it, even Death has bowed a humbled head. And what it could not conquer, it has destroyed. If you doubt such power, you have only to think of me. It was that unholy strength of will that usurped my clean, healthy body, and left me entombed in this swollen, putrescent mass of flesh that has been rotting these twenty years with leprosy.

The Churchyard Yew

BY J. SHERIDAN LeFANU

NOT very far from the edge of Wyvern Moor there stood half a century ago a hamlet of some three hundred souls. Though it has considerably gone to ruin since that time, the hamlet, which went by the name of Hoxley, but was known by some as Marley's Town, after an old family of that place, was once a thriving settlement, and so it will be remembered by persons traveling the Dublin

'Twas an unearthly tree no matter which side of the grave it decorated

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

road four or five decades ago. It was clustered about a church, which stood on a slight rise near the center of the town, in the middle of a yard somewhat larger than usual, and close by to the graveyard.

Quite possibly some of my readers may remember the sexton of that place, a man by the name of Charlie Sprawl. He was a man ill-favored in looks, though of a generally good-natured disposition, so that it was said that the ugliness of his face was made up by his pleasing manner. He was customarily known to wear a shabby brown suit, with a scratch-wig of somewhat the same color, though a little faded, and, while his visage was forbidding, and larger than one might expect because of a certain knobbiness of his head, the rest of his body was slight and somewhat shrunken or held together, as if he were perpetually cold. He was not often seen on the street, but always running to and fro between the church and the rectory, which was on the left of the church, and between the rectory and his own little house, which was far to the right of the church, on the edge of the graveyard; or he was seen busy in the graveyard, in the preparation of a new grave, or the care of an old one.

For all his geniality, he was a party to a dissension of some years' standing with the parish priest, the Reverend Harker, who was a tall, thin man with spidery limbs, of dark complexion and beetling brows, whose suspicious gray eyes, turned upon the members of his flock, caused many a quaking and trembling, of guilt or fear or both. He was an extremely active man, and was constantly about in the hamlet and out of it, paying visits to his parishioners who lived in the neighborhood of Hoxley, and he did not hesitate to speak his mind on any subject, whether it was fitting or not. He was obsessed with a singular devotion to ideas, albeit one at a time, and he could not bear to be contradicted, whether he was right or wrong, a fault which he had in common with some other men of the cloth.

There had been bad blood between the two men for a dozen years or more, all because of a stunted yew tree which grew to the right of the church, some distance away, perhaps three yards or so. During the term of the Reverend Harker's predecessor, Sprawl had planted the tree there, and, hardly had the Reverend Harker come to take up his duties, before he was at Sprawl to move the tree to the other side of the church, the left side, and nothing would do but that it be moved forthwith. This Sprawl would not do; so every little while the parish priest had at him to do as he was told and be done with argument, saying that he wished the tree placed so that he could look upon it from the rectory, to which Sprawl's reply was always the same.

"I'm not a-going to move it, so there's an end. It don't matter to me do you see the tree or not, and that's the fact o't."

Each time the parish priest flew into a rage. "Who is the rector here, you or I?" he would cry out. "I'm minded to put it to the parish."

"Put it then, and be d— to ye," replied Sprawl.

"Lord-amercy! he curses me! The yew must be moved, and if ye're too lazy to do it, it will be I a-doing it myself."

"Not while I'm a-seein' of it, ye won't."

THERE the matter stood, each time, year after year, with Sprawl's muttered curses hot in the priest's ears, and the priest's rage a-burning in Sprawl; so that in time, neither could abide the other; and it was an effort to be civil in public, whereas in private they did not speak except what was necessary, all over a yew which was as ill-favored as the sexton in appearance, if the truth will be known, stunted and unattractive, blessed with no such compensation as the sexton's customarily cordial manner.

It was no secret, for the sexton, who was no man to turn his back upon the solicitations of Bacchus, told the tale repeatedly in the public house, and with much relish; so that the whole parish knew about the feud between the two men, and the one half were all with the priest, holding that he had the right to dispose of the tree as he saw fit, and the other were all with the sexton, agreeing with him that it was, in a manner of speaking, his tree, and its disposal rested with him, dividing in the matter as people always will, without regard to the merits of either side or the principles involved.

Each was as stubborn as the other. The

priest could have sacked the sexton, but he would not do it; to do so would have meant that he had given in, however indirectly; so he would not, but only held to his insistence, calling upon the sexton to obey him as often as he thought about it, which was at least once a month. Nor would Sprawl touch a sprig of the yew; he tended it with greater care than ever, and made a great show of it, which angered the priest the more; so that on more than one occasion he actually came from the rectory with a shovel, prepared to move the tree himself; but each time he was stopped by the baleful glares of the sexton, and retreated.

In this way matters persisted until one night the sexton, having imbibed too freely at the public house, fell into a freshly dug grave on his way through the graveyard to his house, and broke his neck. He was found in the morning, and there was a great disturbance about it; but there was nothing for it but that Sprawl must be carried into the church, and a Mass read over him, and be buried. The hamlet offered a new sexton, a young fellow named Ames, and Sprawl was forgotten.

The old sexton was in his grave less than a fortnight, however, before the priest summoned Ames to him and got at him about the yew.

"I'm minded to have the tree moved from the one side of the church to t' other," he said. "Can you do it this afternoon?"

"That I can, Father. Where will you be wantin' it?"

"Ten to twelve feet this side of the church at the front, neither more nor less," said the priest. "Dig it with care and set it in well."

"It was not Charlie Sprawl's tree then?" inquired Ames.

"Don't be a fool, man! What right had that stubborn thief to claim what belongs to the parish? Get along wi' ye!"

It was a pleasure to have no more of Sprawl's insolent defiance, but it was doubtless also somewhat of a disappointment, too, for he was used to it, and truth to tell, he did not mind it half so much as his rage indicated. He watched with satisfaction while the new sexton transplanted the yew, and that evening, as he read over his last prayers for the day, he sat where he could look out at it from time to time; and it was a gratifying sight, though he could hardly have said whether he was genuinely pleased or only spuriously so, for the winning of his battle only after Sprawl's death was but half the victory.

THAT night he had troubled dreams. His sleep was uneasy and filled with visions of Sprawl's baleful eyes and of the yew; so that several times he woke up and lit a candle to look at the time; which made the night seem longer than usual. In the morning he got up feeling irritable and tired, and with no pleasant thoughts of the old sexton in his mind; but he went about his duties just the same, hurrying to the church to read his daily Mass; so that it was not until he was on his way back that he noticed how the yew stood, ill-planted indeed, almost half-uprooted.

He called the new sexton to him and soundly berated him, for all that Ames swore he had planted the tree firmly and well, and watered it, which only angered the priest the more, since the evidence of his eyes was not to be contradicted, however much the sexton attempted it. So there was nothing to be done but that the yew must be set in anew, and this time the priest himself

supervised the operation, not leaving until he was well satisfied with the planting.

Thenceforth, it was observed that the priest grew increasingly morose and ill-tempered, and his eyes often showed red-rimmed for lack of sleep. He went out less and less, and when he went to read his daily Mass, he went by way of the back door into the church, instead of the front, as he was wont to do. Three times in a fortnight Ames was summoned to reset the yew tree, which was always found unaccountably in some other position but that in which the new sexton planted it, and it was observed by him that the priest seemed to have developed a horror for it, and muttered once or twice about taking it out altogether and setting fire to it.

One morning the priest appeared looking drawn and ill, and Ames was moved to comment on his looks.

"Oh, Ames, I do be a-getting old. Perhaps it is I'd be better off with my old cook I had ten years and more back," he said. And, upon Ames commiserating him, he added that perhaps Ames himself "could come take up abode" with him.

Ames at first held back, thinking that the priest was but at planning to put more work on him, but this was not so, the priest assured him; so Ames took up the proposition and was given a comfortable downstairs room, the priest himself having a preference for the small gable room at the top of the rectory, which was not a large dwelling.

The very first night, however, Ames was awakened by the priest's voice calling out in the dark, and very queer he thought it.

"Is that you, Sprawl?" he cried out. "Lord-a-mercy, get ye back to ye're grave, ye pranking rascal!"

There was more of this, and a great to-do, and presently Ames got up and looked out of his room up the stairs; yet he could see nothing but a patch of moonlight where it lay athwart the stairs; so he went back into his room convinced that the priest suffered evil dreams, and when the house quieted down after midnight, he was able to sleep well enough, for his new bed was far softer than his old.

In the morning the Reverend Harker appeared looking more ill than ever. He had lost flesh, Ames saw now, and his appearance was gaunt and forbidding; his eyes were hollow, in addition to having that look of sleeplessness; and, in answer to Ames' inquiries, he said something about "bad dreams," and muttered that perhaps he had "done wrong," but if so, there would be, he was convinced, "an accounting of it" all in good time.

The next night it was the same.

Ames had hardly gone to sleep before he heard the priest once more.

"In the name of God, get ye gone!" the priest cried. He called out much more in this vein, but not all of it was plain to Ames, and twice Ames thought he heard some other's voice answer the priest.

BUT again, when he peered out of his room he could see nothing, though he fancied he saw a shadow that was darker than the others, up on the landing before the door of the priest's room. It had the look of a small man with a large, knobbed head, but in another moment it had the appearance of a dwarfed tree, and in yet another it was dissipated, so that Ames drew back into his room filled with wonder at what went on in the priest's room, for the sounds continued half the night; and Ames thought it a queer sort of nightmare to last so long, for it was always as if someone was at the priest about something, and the priest would not give in.

"I won't do it!" he shouted, and, "Go to the devil, where ye belong!" and, "I've done no wrong; ye had it while ye could see 't," and so on for better than half the hours of darkness.

The next morning the priest appeared all done in, like a very sick man. But he had a stubborn set to his jaw, and he did not wish to speak of his "dreams," as he called them. Yet several times he went to the window and looked out at the yew tree, very wrathfully, Ames recalled afterwards, and he stood there muttering, and despite his cloth, cursing a little. He read Mass that morning with a face dark as a thundercloud, and those of his parishioners who sat in the front rows were frightened at his appearance, and crossed themselves more often than customary.

All that day the priest was in a temper, being very irritable with Ames, shouting at him for this and for that, so that Ames

scarcely knew what he was about from one hour to the next.

THAT night, which was Ames' third in the house, the new sexton was awakened by an almighty shouting and to-do in the gable room; first it was as of a babbling of voices in a raging quarrel, and then it was as of someone pleading; and poor Ames was hard put to it to know what to do, and, for lack of knowing, he kept to his room and said a prayer every now and then, listening from time to time, but he heard little save that the priest cried out that he had in truth "been fair wi' ye," and he expected the other to be as fair with him. It was at the hour of midnight that the hullaballoo began, and Ames fancied the priest called his name, but he could not be sure. He went, nevertheless, to the door with the intention of mounting the stairs at least to the door of the Reverend Harker's room, but he had no sooner reached the threshold, than he was halted by a tremendous clattering on the stairs, as if someone had fallen down the steps; so that he bided his time, listening, and he heard the front door open and close, and then all was still. He opened his own door a crack and looked out, but he could see nothing; he had lit a candle and now he thrust this forth, but still he saw nothing; so he withdrew it, blew it out, and stood in the darkness of his room.

But, happening to look from his window into the moonlit churchyard, he was astonished to observe two men, one of them short and knob-headed, and the other tall and thin; and of them, the taller seemed to lean heavily on the shorter, so that it was almost as if he were being half-carried; they were walking in the direction of the church, straight toward the yew tree which had given Ames such a parcel of trouble. Seeing this, Ames went once more to the door of his room and opened it, sticking his head out, cocked for the gable room; but listen as he would, he heard nothing; all was still.

Returning again to the window, he was astonished anew to see that not only were the two men gone, but the yew tree likewise. At this he was much troubled in mind, and several times meant to go up to the gable room; but he had always been adjured not to disturb the priest at his slumber, and he had too much respect for a man of the cloth to overcome his own troubled fears; so that, in the end, he said a prayer or two and retired to his bed, where, after lying for a while listening in vain for anything more, he slept.

In the morning he was greatly disturbed to find that the priest had not come down, and he was beset by doubt as to his course. If he were to awaken the priest from a sleep gained only after so hard-fought a battle with his evil nightmares, he might earn a swift punishment; yet the priest was required to read Mass. He did not know what to do and puzzled over it for some time; but at last he determined to make some effort to rouse the priest, and went up to the room in the gable. He knocked on the door but received no answer; he called softly to the priest, but again he had no answer; and then, perceiving that the door stood slightly ajar, he pushed it timidly open, whereupon he gaped in amazement, for the room was torn up in a manner which betokened a great struggle of some kind, with the bedding pulled from the bed and strewn all about, chairs knocked over, and the crucifix and some pictures torn off the wall and broken. The priest was nowhere to be seen, though Ames poked at a shamble of bedding heaped in one corner.

But, as he was coming down the stairs, sorely troubled, there was a knocking at the door; and, going to answer it, Ames discovered a woman of the neighborhood in great excitement, so that she could hardly speak.

"Lord-a-mercy, Mr. Ames," she cried, "I seen a shoe with a foot in it under the yew by the church. Will ye fetch the Reverend, Mr. Ames? It's nigh took me wi' a fever to see such a sight."

"Now hush and be off wi' ye, and I'll look to't," said Ames, and off he set in great haste for the churchyard.

There he found the yew tree back where it had been in Sprawl's time, set down in the earth in such fashion that it would be hard put to it to grow, and standing all awry. Sticking out of the ground at one side of it was a man's leg, sure enough, and a shoe Ames recognized as belonging to the priest, for no one else in the neighborhood wore shoes in any way similar. Though almost stupefied at the sight of it, Ames ran off to fetch help, and, coming back, they dug

down, and there was the priest, or what was left of him, dead and buried, no worse off than Sprawl, and no better, he being in one part of the churchyard, and Sprawl in the other!

IN DUE course the coroner held the inquest, and the jury affirmed "that the deceased, the Reverend Timothy Harker, died by accident, while attempting to transplant a yew tree, falling into the hole he had dug and pulling the tree down on top of him." But Ames had a different opinion about the priest's death, and so did old Tom Marley, who was making his way home in the small hours of the morning during that last night the priest had suffered his bad "dreams," and, though somewhat the worse for drink, swore to his dying day he had seen a man digging to the right of the church, perhaps three yards or so from the building, in that place where the yew had stood in Sprawl's time, and another lying "all of a heap aside," and the tree, too; and, being in a jovial mood and not thinking to wonder who might be about at such an hour, he had hailed him, and the digger, who was a short man, with a big, knobbed head, turned and looked at him with eyes that were a-shine with a light like fire, but said nothing, so startling Tom that the old man had run home as fast as he could and fell into his house a-babbling of speaking to Charlie Sprawl. But his daughter made short shrift of him, paying no attention to what he said, and getting him off to his bed; and afterwards for a long time Tom held his tongue, though people noticed he took to going home after dark the long way round, so that he would not have to pass neighboring the place at which Ames had put back the churchyard yew where Sprawl had had it.

Malleus Maleficarum

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The Damp Man

GEORGE PELGRIM sat with exaggerated boredom on the uncomfortable wood benches of the amphitheatre. The sign above the several rows proclaimed that this was the section reserved for the press, but George, as his sprawled long legs and discontented manner indicated, was neither impressed by the sign nor the spectacle going on beneath him in the pool where the Women's State Swimming Championships were being held.

Despite his comparatively young years, Pelgrim had covered a newspaper reporter's average quota of big stories, including those of the sports variety. This was a comedown. More than that, it was an out-and-out indignity, and for at least the tenth time that day, Pelgrim reviewed the disadvantages of working for a big short-handed metropolitan daily with the inevitable shuffling of assignments to its younger members that shorthandedness dictated. Still, covering something like a girls' swimming meet, and a relatively obscure one at that, was going too far. He'd taken a lot from McBrien, his editor, but this was . . .

Five similar forms splashed mightly below him, and one in a red cap finally forged ahead and touched the pool's end. The p.a. system then announced that the 100-yard free style winner was Miss Linda Mallory. Second was Miss Mary Ciphers, the former title-holder in this event. . . .

George yawned. Thank God it was the last event. He slouched out of the stands, passing by the public-relations table to pick up a press sheet with Events, Winners, and Times. Now a few words from the new 100-yard champion and he'd be through this day's work. He took his time getting to the clubhouse and then he flashed his press pass at the doorway that proclaimed, "No Visitors —Contestants' Entrance." He nodded to a timer he recognized as someone he'd seen several times before at track meets—Oh happy days!—then he buttonholed one of the ribboned committeemen.

"I'd like to see that girl who won the 100-yard. Just a few words." He looked down at his sheet. "Mallory?"

"Ah yes, Miss Mallory," said the committeeman, filled with be-nice-to-the-press resolutions. "A fine swimmer!"

He beckoned the newspaperman to follow him and went down a corridor stopping before a door, knocking on it and then sticking his head in to murmur a few words. Then he turned back.

"Go right in."

Pelgrim went in. Linda Mallory was standing just inside. Pelgrim got the impression of well-built blondeness. She was dressed in street clothes now.

"I'm Pelgrim of the *Gazette*," he mumbled. "I'd just like a few words, Miss Mallory. Is this the first district championship you've won? How old are you?"

HE SHOT forth a few other questions. Get - it - over - with - as - soon - as - possible Pelgrim. Then for the first time he really looked at her. She was very pretty, if you like the big healthy athletic type. But there was something else. One shapely arm was holding onto the dressing table as though she needed its support. George's eyes narrowed. This was a strange way for a newly crowned champion to act. She ought to be pleased. Instead, Linda Mallory was terrified.

There was an awkward silence and then the girl managed the ghost of a smile.

"I'm sorry," she said and squared her shoulders. "I'm twenty and this is the first

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

He was so obviously a man: so obviously, too, not a human!

BY ALLISON V. HARDING

time I've won a county championship. It's very nice." Her voice trailed off and she didn't look as though she thought there was anything nice about it.

"Okay, thanks Miss Mallory."

George's puzzlement at the girl's anxiety was being submerged by his indignation at having this assignment. He turned on his heel.

"Wait a minute, please!" She touched his arm imperatively. "Did you see anyone outside in the hall or coming through the clubhouse? A large man, fat, that is, in a dark suit with . . . with . . . ?"

George frowned. "Didn't notice. Say, are you all right, Miss Mallory? I mean, are you sick or anything?"

She shook her head. "No, no, I'm all right. I just wondered if you'd seen this person. I'm afraid I haven't been much good at being interviewed."

"I've got enough," replied Pelgrim and he stepped to the door. "About this friend of yours. I wouldn't worry though. He'll find you."

"Yes," said Linda Mallory, "I guess he will!"

The best part of the day for Pelgrim started twenty minutes later when he ran into Al Holden entirely unexpectedly. He filed his story hurriedly and left the telegrapher's office arm in arm with Al. There were many "You old son-of-a-gun. Haven't seen you since . . ." He and his former pal repaired to the nearest bistro, and within a few minutes all thoughts of Linda Mallory had gone from Pelgrim's consciousness. He had enough presence of mind come six-twenty-five, though, to slap Holden on the back.

"It's been great, Al, but I've got to run. That old buzzard boss of mine has probably got three or four other jobs for his errand boys tonight!"

He made the 6:45 train to the city and settled into an empty seat, pleasantly mellowed by the five or six drinks and the realization that he had a three-quarters of an hour ride before he reached town, with the possibilities therein contained for a little nap.

He was dreaming gently of riding a huge rubber sea serpent in Central Park Lake when the sea serpent reached up a suddenly grown tentacle and began to shake him. He did what he could, but the sea serpent was persistent. George woke up and looked into Linda Mallory's startled face. It was her hand on his arm.

"Mr. Pelgrim, I'm so sorry. I saw you and sat down here in the seat next to you. I . . . I'm scared, Mr. Pelgrim. *He's* on this train."

STILL only half awake, the only thing the reporter could think of was the sea serpent, and where Linda Mallory came in with the sea serpent was more than he could figure out. He straightened against the car seat with the self-conscious air of someone who is silently saying that of course he wasn't really asleep. He looked at the girl's agitated face and then took her hand because it seemed the thing to do. It was a nice hand, cool, or maybe that was because he'd had those drinks with Al Holden. Or maybe it was because she was so frightened.

"Now listen," he spoke in the heavy paternal manner of someone of his years to another person not too many years younger. "What's this all about?"

He remembered her as someone so self-possessed and confident that afternoon in her blue bathing suit with the red cap. Now she was, well, almost pathetic. Pelgrim was good at listening. He listened. He nodded at the right times and looked straight ahead, hoping his breath wasn't still one hundred percent alcoholic. After all, you don't meet an old friend like Al Holden every day. And that was a good excuse to top off a few.

Linda Mallory's story was straightforward and well-expressed, he analyzed. The telling of it seemed to help her. Anyway, she was less agitated at the finish. She was from the West. From the earliest she could remember, she told Pelgrim, she'd just had an aunt in the world and an ability to swim faster than the other kids in school. Her home town had first sent her east to compete in a small meet and she'd won. There were the usual offers then to compete in other meets.

In the meantime, she'd gotten a modest job in an office in town—she could type—and everything seemed fine until one day she'd met him. It was just recently. She'd competed in a meet and had been walking to the clubhouse when this man had loomed

up in front of her. He'd said something, she wasn't quite sure now, like "You are to be mine," or some such strange statement. He'd held his arms out to her, maybe beseechingly, maybe threateningly, she wasn't sure. She'd dodged his advances and brushed on by hurriedly, but he was outside when she'd left the dressing quarters.

HE'D followed her to the bus the swimmers took back to town. She'd boarded it heaving a sigh of relief as his gross figure faded in the distance when they got under way. Then miraculously he'd turned up one morning not many days later, sitting in the lobby of her hotel. He'd followed her through the streets. He'd been outside her office when she left at five-thirty.

Once she'd called a policeman, but when the officer had turned to look in the direction she indicated, there was no one. He was clever, this big man.

Pelgrim thought to himself, Well, why not? There are plenty of these cranks around. You don't need to work on a newspaper to realize that and she's a cute kid. She *was*.

Aloud he asked, "You think you saw him this afternoon out at the meet and you think he's on this train?"

She nodded. "I know he is, Mr. Pelgrim."

"Well, we'll look into that, and in the meantime, cut out the Mister Pelgrim business. A lot of people have worse names for me but let's compromise and you call me George. Just what does this man look like?"

Linda shuddered. "He's . . . he's awful! I don't know how to describe him exactly except that he's very big and fat and he always has on a dark suit like a chauffeur's suit but it isn't really. But you know that dark material. And his face is lumpy and kind of swollen. And his eyes scare me, too. I tell you, Mr. Pel—George—that time I came downstairs in my hotel and saw him sitting there, those eyes looked at me over a newspaper he'd been reading. It made me feel all . . .' she shuddered again.

"You sit tight, "George advised. "I'm going to see if I can spot him."

"He's back of us," Linda Mallory indicated. "I saw him get on the end of the train."

George got up and tried to look formidable. Maybe walking would clear the last "Great-to-see-you-Al-Holden" cobwebs out of his brain. He smiled and pointed towards the back.

"He went this way?"

Linda smiled back. "Look, is this the right thing to do? I mean, don't get into any trouble on account of me."

"I'm interested. I want to see this fascinated fan of yours for myself."

He left her sitting there looking after him. There were one, two, three, four cars behind theirs. The reporter walked slowly down the aisle, hands thrust deep in his pockets, looking casually from side to side. The usual assortment of flower-dress ladies, candy-eating children, men with their papers. A couple of long-stouts with papers. In the last car one had on a brown suit, the other had on sort of a gray and darkish sort of suit. He was buried in his paper, too. Looked pretty big from the shoulders.

The train slowed for a suburban station and stopped. George stood on the back platform with his eyes on the big fellow's back, undecided. Then he started up the aisle retracing his steps. When he came abreast of the suspect, he bobbed his head down.

"Pardon me," he thumbed at an item in the paper.

The fellow's face came out the other side of the tabloid.

"Friend of mine," murmured George apologetically.

The stranger's face was belligerent. It was also long, thin and horse. It looked as though it were backed up by a good wallop. George smilingly backed away. It wasn't the man. The train started up again. Maybe he'd missed the guy the first time, or maybe he'd gotten off. George got back to his car and rehearsed a small speech. It was an excuse to hold her nice, capable hand again. He'd say, "There's nothing to worry about. Believe me, I fingerprinted all the guys back there. There's nobody answering your three-state alarm on the train."

But there was no speech because Linda Mallory was gone. And she wasn't on the train. George assured himself of that by looking through the forward cars. He fumed the rest of the way into town.

Three days later Pelgrim's desk phone jangled. It was Linda. Despite himself, he'd wondered about her even though with

proper reportorial cynicism he told himself the whole business was probably screwy.

"Well, why the vanishing act?"

She apologized fervently, "But I had to. Just after you'd gone up the aisle out of the car, he appeared. I couldn't stand it. I got off at the next stop."

George um-hummed.

"Could I talk to you sometime?"

George with studied effort answered slowly. "Well, I guess so. Where are you?"

Linda Mallory gave the name of a hotel.

"I'll come up this evening," he said and hung up.

As he sat at his desk, the reporter realized he wasn't at all sure about Linda Mallory, about a lot of things concerning her. He admitted to himself reluctantly though that he was sure of one thing. He was glad to hear from her.

THAT night he arrived in the lobby of her building at the appointed time. It was a women's hotel and the downstairs was filled with potted palms and waiting males. She was there standing by the desk, and he thought mentally that the simple blue dress became her. She certainly didn't *look* like someone suffering from hallucinations.

He liked the way she stuck her hand out when she saw him and her smile—he'd liked that before.

"Let's sit over here," she motioned towards an off-the-floor alcove where there were a couple of chairs. He followed.

She looked at him intently. "If I were you, I'd probably think I was crazy."

He smiled. "My sentiments almost exactly," Pelgrim replied.

"I really don't have any right to get you into this and you've been very kind."

"Into what?" he persisted. "After all, if you don't mind my saying so, and if you do, I'll still say it, aren't you getting a little overwrought about the attentions of a fan of yours?"

"He's been here," she went on ignoring his question. "I think he got off just as I did at that station. I got a bus but he followed me."

"Look, if this thing is bothering you so much," George suggested, "why not get the police in on it? I mean really, a man sitting in your hotel lobby, following you to your job, shadowing you home from work. You've got a perfect right to—"

"He's clever," she said, and the fear look came back into her eyes. "I told you before, once in the street I spoke to an officer. He seems to anticipate . . . I mean he was just gone when the policeman looked. Last night, George, I worked late. When I came out, I didn't see him. I didn't look for him very hard. I guess I thought that he'd have gotten tired waiting for me. I went to a restaurant a couple of blocks away from here, and when I came out it was pitch dark. I was walking, not thinking of anything, you understand, not expecting to hear anything when I heard his steps behind me. You can't miss the sound. It's the sort of noise wet crepe rubber makes.

"I guess I lost my head. I ran the rest of the way here. Then I stood just inside the door and looked outside. I didn't see him again."

Pelgrim thought that over for a minute.

"Tell you, what you need is to get out of here for a little while. Stop thinking about it. Let's go to a show or something."

She brightened. "That'd be swell."

"All right, I'll wait right here and you go upstairs and get your coat."

He saw her disappear into the shining maw of the elevator. Then his eyes wandered over the people in the lobby. His spot was advantageous. From his side alcove he could see without himself being noticed. Harmless enough looking, everybody was.

His mind running over the things Linda Mallory had told him turned a sudden flip-flop, landing in a new position. This man, this follower she complained of and seemed so frightened of. It was strange no one else ever noticed him. He himself, for instance, or the policeman Linda admitted having spoken to one day on the street. There were all these episodes, these macabre details of some ungainly creature trailing her through the streets and everywhere, and yet no one apparently but Linda Mallory ever saw the man.

George had the average college-educated young man's rudimentary knowledge of psychology. How many times in the lay press had he read of things like a persecution complex—persons thinking other people are plotting against them, following them, whis-

pering about them, etc.? Linda, in spite of her small job and her occasional swimming contests, was essentially very much alone here in the city, and he knew nothing about her background really. It was an uncomfortable thought, one that shouldered its way into his mind rather than was welcomed there, but newspaper work demands objectivity, and this conclusion was at least a possible one, based on the facts as he knew them.

HE COULD admit to himself that Linda Mallory was attractive, straightforward and nice. There was a simplicity about her that pleased him, and yet fear had been the most dominant chord in her make-up, a fixed fear about one thing that she hadn't been able to demonstrate for anyone else.

Unhappy at his own thoughts, George got up and ambled towards the front door. It was hot in here. He pushed through the portal, coming out on the street. There was one small bulb set in the middle of the awning that ran out to the curb. George stepped out of its depressingly feeble circle of light, fumbling for a cigarette in his jacket pocket. As he did so, he collided with someone.

The reporter mumbled, "Sorry," and the other figure moved away from him towards the door of the hotel. George turned. He gaped. The retreating figure was that of a very large fat man, his ungainly body fitted into a rumpled dark cloth suit. Pelgrim flicked his cigarette into the street and followed.

Inside he saw the other man walking purposefully toward the alcove which George, himself, had just quit a moment or so ago. George took a few tentative steps in that direction. The man picked out the chair George had been sitting in and lowered himself heavily into it. Pelgrim had a glimpse of a fleshy dead-white face, and then an evening paper ascended in front of the waistcoat and head like a protective barrier.

George changed his mind, turned around and headed towards the desk. It was placed near the elevators and he would see her the moment she got down. He waited, tapping nervously on the counter. From this point he couldn't quite see into the corner of the alcove where the man sat.

Finally the metal door of the lift opened and Linda came out. He was at her side in an instant and ferried her across the floor towards the door. He said something, something trivial about what movie do you think we ought to see? or some such, and he purposely walked on the alcove side.

As George pushed her through the door, he flashed a quick glance to one side. The big man in the dark suit was still sitting there, the paper still in front of him, but it had lowered just a trifle, just enough to show a pair of eyes. And the eyes were on them. . . .

They decided on a movie nearby. As they walked, George said to himself, Now you mustn't look back. You'll make her nervous, and yet look back was what he wanted to do more than anything else and still he couldn't be sure. There were other large men in dark suits who sat around reading papers. Pelgrim tried listening, but have you ever attempted to pick out a particular set of footsteps on a street in a crowded city?

When they got under the lighted theatre marquee, he was able to crane his neck. He spotted no one in the square of yellow light or on its outskirts. They went in and sat halfway down on the right side. The double feature was a whodunit and a comedy. Linda laughed at the slapstick and George was pleased.

It meant she was forgetting herself some, enjoying herself.

He murmured to her, "I've got to call into the office. Be back in just a sec."

IT WAS a half-truth. The phone to his paper was not imperative but Pelgrim did want to do a reconnaisance. The movie audience had thinned out even more, and with his back to the screen and the reflected light shining on the empty seats, it was easy for him to see the large, bulking figure sitting eight rows behind them. His emotions were half and half as he thumbed a nickel into the dial phone. He was annoyed and angry, and there was also a sort of creepy feeling up his back and neck because he had thought all sorts of things about Linda in the beginning. Maybe she was pulling a fake or throwing a psycho at him, and all the time there was a guy and he did just what she said he did.

He got the paper. "Hello, is Jim Crosier there?"

He was told Crosier had left half an hour earlier. He had reasons of his own for wanting to speak to the veteran newspaperman, but if he wasn't there—that was that.

George hurried back down the aisle and then he slowed as he neared it. For directly back of Linda, now, the big man was sitting. He'd moved up in the couple of moments Pelgrim had been away. George moved down beside her. She was smiling at something on the screen, oblivious of anything else around her. He'd have to handle this skillfully.

"Look," he said, "I'm sorry but it looks as though we ought to head out. We must be almost up to where we came in."

He hated to take the kid away from this thing. She seemed to be enjoying it, but she nodded, good sport that she was. He pushed her hurriedly down the row and maneuvered her up the aisle so she wouldn't notice.

"I'm sorry," Linda Mallory apologized when they got outside. "You shouldn't have spent so much time with me tonight, should you?"

He sighed in mock tragedy and tried to make his tones light, "They'll probably have me back filling inkwells in the morning!"

They stopped at an all-night eatery, and over a cup of coffee, George made a decision. The whole thing was queer and mysterious enough without adding unnecessarily to those factors. The diner clock said that it was after twelve.

The streets were deserted as they walked from out of the oblong of light thrown down by the eatery's windows. A soft spring fog had crept in from the sea, muffling the sound of occasional midnight traffic, swathing the lonely streetlamps in ghostly halos and cutting visibility to not many yards.

They walked between rows of brick-fronted houses, houses that were lonely and ghostly as though they had never known human habitation, and their steps echoed soddenly from the pavements.

IT WAS in the middle of one dingy block that George felt Linda's fingers tighten on his arm. Her hearing had been perhaps keener than his, but when the dying sound of a distant el train was completely gone, he knew too that there were footsteps behind them. He looked at Linda Mallory. Her red mouth was partly open as though there were a question which she feared to ask.

He put his fingers over his hand. "What's the matter?"

He smiled even though he knew; they both knew. They walked on, and as though by mutual consent their steps were faster, but there seemed no end to this long black block. And the sounds behind them were more clearly defined. Perhaps because their senses were keyed so high and sent so completely backward towards the one focus point, or perhaps because the steps were actually nearer, gaining on them.

You know how it is when you were a child, a child somewhere in the darkness of night or in the darkness of an old house or in the darkness of your own imagination, the mad irresistible urge that sweeps over you suddenly, so suddenly to flee with all the strength of your being, to run, to hide.

There is some of that in all of us at certain times. It touched George briefly, a touch of darkness and fog, the run-and-hide urge, and he felt it in Linda too and her frightened look at him said so. With the other emotions and the thinking that was going on in his head, there was still room for pity for her. She'd had this unpleasant thing to fight with before and before. He was new to it, and the newness must be worth something, he resolved.

"Take it easy," he murmured to her.

She worked a little grin. "I just know I'd be sprinting by now if I were alone," Linda admitted.

In the tunnel of darkness ahead, there beckoned the wan yellow beacon of a street light. The single bulb glowed weakly in the sticky atmosphere. They marched toward it, and marched was the word, for George kept their paces even. It was a matter of morale, he knew instinctively; that if they once broke stride, they would run helter-skelter, an absurd mad spectacle of two very frightened people who should know better, plummeting down the lonely thoroughfare until they would trip and hurt themselves or come suddenly upon a greater brightness and busyness of the city and suddenly feel ashamed.

Pelgrim was no fool. He thought he had

calculated their situation and their chances. No casual bad man, no mugger or stick-up artist wastes his time tracking one person night after night. A big-city hold-up is as impersonal as an auto accident. It is completely indiscriminate. If you happen to be on such-and-such a street at such-and-such a time, you will feel a gun in your ribs or a billy on your skull, you or you or anyone else.

No, the lure here was the girl, and what he did not know about her could be his undoing, their undoing, and this disquieting thought made George stare at Linda again, so suddenly that she felt it and looked back. He felt ashamed of himself for any suspicions he might have had. This girl was honest. She'd told him what she knew. There was nothing contrived that she was a party to. A kidnaping was absurd and seemed out of the question. There were easier ways. This long surveillance, for instance. Why would that be necessary? And not Linda Mallory, a girl who made a tiny salary and was, at the most, only a promising swimmer of small local accomplishment.

This left another field, a category as dark and dank and misty as the night. This large man was one of those myriads of persons who tramp through the city and country on some small, strange purpose of their own. Small to us but large to them. The not wholly normal people. The twisted. The insane.

George wished he had a gun or a club or anything. They reached the oasis of light and he told her quickly, "You stand on the other side of it. Do you know the way to your hotel from here?"

She nodded.

"Sure?"

She nodded again.

"Just stand there. Don't say anything. Don't do anything, but if I tell you to run, run as fast as you can and keep running until you get where there are some more people or you see a policeman or you reach your hotel. Don't stop for anything else, you understand?"

She nodded for the third time. "But what about you?"

"I'm going to try and find out about this guy. Linda, there must be some explanation to this."

He hoped it sounded good the way he put it.

"Maybe he thinks you're his long-lost daughter or something."

THE steps were much nearer now and Pelgrim could see what she meant about wet crepe-rubber soles, almost a sloshing sound on the damp pavements. Linda backed away from him into the shadows on the other side of the circle of luminance. Satisfied, the reporter turned and faced the way they'd come. He took a few steps into the darkness, turned his head to look once more where Linda was. Good. From here, even knowing she was there, he could hardly make out her figure, and he waited.

The sounds seemed an endless number of heartbeats, of deep anticipatory breaths and then out of the blackness loomed up a greater blackness. It was the large man, looking even larger than George had remembered him, looking of the night itself with his dark suit and midnight fedora.

The steps stopped. The man stopped not a pace away from Pelgrim. The light shone on his lumpy, whitish face. The thin street-lamp light and shadows made more grotesqueness of the ungainly figure and the pads of flesh that were hands and jowls.

George stepped nearer quickly. Attack was his only plan.

"You following someone, Bud?"

Closer, he was appalled by the repulsiveness of the man. The eyes were one color black. They had no depth, no expression. They were simply round disks like the button gimlets of a cod exhibited in the window of a fish store. There was something else about the man that came over George, suddenly freezing him with a horror that was hard to control. He looked . . . he looked like someone George remembered years ago, a bloated body grappling irons had pulled out of the river one cold night onto a police-launch deck.

The skin looked like this, the puffiness, the blue-whiteness, the eyes expressionless with death. You don't see a thing like that often. But dead men don't speak. This one said, "Where is she?" and there was a flash of something unreadable in the dark ugly eyes.

The voice was deep with a resonant bar-

rel-like quality. The words were spoken slowly.

"Where's who?" shot back Pelgrim.

"The girl."

"What do you want with her? You've got a hell of a nerve, Mister . . ."

The big fellow's eyes stopped their peripatetic course and fixed themselves over the reporter's shoulder. Without looking, Pelgrim knew Linda had been spotted. He sensed the big body before him gathering itself and he dove forward just as the other man lunged.

As George drove his fists, he yelled, "Run, Linda, run!"

And above the sound of that message's echo in the lonely street, he heard her heels clicking away furiously. His fists pounded into the spongy monstrous hulk, and then a heavy fat hand smacked into the side of his neck making his senses reel. George almost went down but clung to a thick flaying arm. The large man reached forward. A shoulder caught him and George went to his knees grabbing a leg.

The big man grunted.

George saw the kick coming too late. It landed between his eyes and then the blackness of the street and the dark bulk of his opponent were swallowed up into an even greater blackness.

The next thing George knew, he felt the pressure of an arm under his head. He blinked at the flashlight in his eyes as a voice was saying, "There now, buddy, you're coming around."

He struggled to raise himself, and the light of the flashlight glanced off shiny policeman buttons. Another cop held the torch, and behind them was the white dome of a police radio car. George finally made it to his feet. There was a lump on his forehead and his senses were still faint with more fog than the night air. He gave his name and address mechanically to the inquiring policeman, showing his press card.

"You don't know who this guy was?" queried one of the uniforms.

"Nope." No use telling the full story now. The important thing was to find out whether Linda had made it okay to her building.

"Will you give me a lift?" He designated the street where she lived.

THEY piled him in behind them and drove him to his destination. Almost before he got out of the police car, Linda had come through the door and was greeting him.

She was shaking.

"George, I was scared stiff!"

"C'mon, let's get back inside," Pelgrim said.

"George, your head. . . ."

"Never mind that." He steered her towards the alcove. "Any sign of him here?"

She shook her head sideways. "What happened? Those police and that head of yours!"

He told her quickly what had happened.

"You shouldn't have made me leave you," she criticized.

"You would have been a fine lot of help. No, this baby's a tough one, Linda. Now listen. I want you to go up to your room and I want you to stay there. No matter what happens, stay there! He can't get upstairs in this building. I'll phone you in the morning. Okay?"

She agreed.

"This time Buster has overstepped himself. We'll get that guy, Linda, don't worry."

"What . . . who is he?" she asked. "I mean, what's it all about, George?"

The fear look he hated to see was there again but he couldn't blame her.

"There's something else I want to ask you, George?"

"Yeah?"

"When you fought with him just now, did he grab hold of you at any time, or did you touch him?"

Pelgrim smiled wryly and motioned to his forehead.

"A pretty good grab, don't you think?"

"I mean . . ." she persisted, "there's something about that man that's not right. I told you the time at the swimming meet, he took hold of my arms and then I had to push him away. It was, well, it was almost as though he'd been in *swimming*. Did you notice anything strange like that?"

George laughed raucously. "You think the bird is dead! Someone come back from a watery grave? Your Uncle Egbert who sailed before the mast and died on the Spanish Main!"

"Don't laugh," she protested. "It's just that I . . ."

"He's flesh and blood, Linda. There's nothing dead about him."

"I didn't quite mean that."

"Well, stop meaning or thinking anything," the reporter ordered. "Go upstairs to your room and get some sleep. Forget it. I know that's pap advice but it's best. I'll call you in the morning. All right?"

They both rose. She squeezed his hand. "And thank you so much. This is my affair and my trouble and yet you've made it yours. I don't know what I'd have done without you. Probably gone completely batty."

"Forget it." He was embarrassed. "Call you in the morning."

He saw her to the elevator and only when the doors clanged shut behind her did he head for the hotel entrance. Pelgrim still felt a bit shaky so he hailed a taxi. As they drew into the avenue, George spotted something out the side window. As they flashed by, he saw the unmistakable familiar bulk leaning casually against a mailbox, face turned towards the hotel facade. George tapped on the partition.

"Cabby, wait a up a minute! I want to go back."

"Can't make a U-turn here, mister," the driver complained. "Against the law."

The next best thing was to describe a square around the block. By the time the mailbox landmark came in sight again though, the large man was gone. George settled back in the cab satisfied there was nothing more he could do this night.

Home in his apartment he wrung a towel out in cold water and put it around his head. It helped the throbbing, made him think better. That little thing Linda had spoken of, what she'd noticed about this man. He'd noticed it, too. The strange abnormal wetness of those beefy hamlike hands. Perhaps there were physical diseases that caused these things, he wouldn't know, and perhaps with them there was some sort of mental derangement that went as companion symptoms. All these things he could and would find out. In the meantime, he was going to shuffle the deck and make the Queen of Hearts disappear.

His alarm knocked the sleep out of him at seven-thirty. Within half an hour with a shower and a coffee-and-eggs breakfast out of the way, he was on the phone to Linda Mallory.

"Number One," he enumerated pedantically, "I want you to pack up, Linda. Buster knows where you are. We're going to fix that. Number Two, phone that place where you work and tell them you're terribly sorry you're not coming back."

He forced both points home over her mild protests.

"Do anything you want around there, but don't leave the hotel. Understand?"

She did. He hung up and left for the office, surprising the newspaper staff considerably from copy boy to junior reporters by his early arrival.

He went into the office he shared with Jim Crosier and slammed the door. It was too early for the other man to be there but George made good use of his time. By ten o'clock he'd located a place on the other side of town where he could get a room for Linda. It was in a respectable neighborhood not far from a subway. By ten-thirty he'd fixed it up with Mort Hoge, the Sunday feature editor, to take Linda on as a typist in that department.

Crosier came in then and Pelgrim went to town.

"So you're the number one crime reporter in the county." It was a joke between them and Crosier liked it that way. Actually the older man did know the subject. He was an expert on the history of violence, on court procedure and the legal aspects.

George outlined his experiences with Linda Mallory. At the end the other reporter smiled.

"You stuck on the girl?"

Pelgrim huffed and puffed.

"I see you are," Jim answered his own question. "And you haven't been drinking too much lately, have you?"

"Say now, wait a minute. If you think I got this kick in the head . . ."

"Probably fell off a bar stool. Listen, George. The young lady evidently has other admirers besides you. This fat man is one of them. You know what they say about our present civilization and competition. You'll just have to accept it, kid. What's that? No, son, it's a tough point legally to get a man arrested because you say he's been following

someone. About your drunken brawl with him last night . . ." Croiser guffawed, ". . . I don't know."

George choked down an angry retort as the other reporter turned to his typewriter. And yet hadn't he, himself, been skeptical in the beginning? No, he guessed he'd have to handle it himself without court orders or the Police Department or Crosier.

There was one little thing, though, that would help. He'd get a gun. That was only feasible.

He left the office at noon and took a taxi up to Linda's hotel. He buzzed her on the house phone, told her to come downstairs with her luggage. She was with him inside of ten minutes and he was quieting her protests.

"Now, don't worry. I've got another place for you."

No, she wasn't to leave the new address as a forwarding one. After a moment they decided that she could refer any messages or mail to the swimming club she belonged to.

THE taxi they took drove an eccentric course until George, peering out of the back window, was satisfied there was no pursuit. Their destination was an old five-story brownstone house. The landlady was a Mrs. Brumley, a plump oldish woman, the widow of a former *Gazette* reporter. She bestowed a motherly greeting on them both.

"It's good to see you," she said to Pelgrim. "And I've got the third floor rear for the young lady."

George saw Linda up the creaking carpeted stairs. Hers was a big airy room looking out over back yards.

"Like it?"

"I think it's grand," Linda replied.

"Okay now, you get settled and then tomorrow you arrive down at my newspaper office at nine sharp." He gave her the address. "Don't expect to see me," George warned, "but they're expecting you in Department D."

He went downstairs and spoke to Mrs. Brumley for a moment before he left. He explained that Miss Mallory had had the unwanted attentions of a man forced upon her for some time and that that was the reason for the hurry-up change of address. Mrs. Brumley was to see that she was disturbed by no strangers here, especially—and George described the large man carefully.

The telephone cut into Pelgrim's sleep the next morning. One half-opened eye focused on the clock beside the receiver. He pulled the instrument from its cradle, grouchily, noting that it was before eight. He made the noise that is a sleepy man's hello, and then her words cut into him deeper than the phone bell.

It was Linda and she was frightened, very frightened. George Pelgrim's eyes were open wide now.

"Hey, wait a minute. Hold on," he checked her. "What was that again?"

"It's in the paper," she repeated. "Peggy Greene, she lived next door to me at the hotel! I've mentioned her to you, George. Well, maybe I haven't."

"Well, what about—?"

"She's dead, I'm trying to tell you! They found her in the night!"

"That's tough," he sympathized, "awfully tough. I know it's an awful shock, but I don't get—"

"George, it's the same business, I'm sure! Listen to me. Peggy was almost my size. Yesterday when I was packing up, she asked to borrow my blue suit. I loaned it to her. She wanted to wear it last night. Don't you *see*, George? She's blonde like me, too. *He* thought it was me!"

The reporter thought for a moment.

"Get your breakfast there and wait for me. I'll pick you up," he ordered and hung up.

THIRTY minutes later in a taxi he read the early edition *Gazette*. The crime rated a four-column headline. She'd been choked, police thought, some time around midnight "in a lonely section not a dozen blocks from her hotel—." It made George wonder if it was the same "lonely section" where he and Linda had had their experience earlier. "The cause of death was strangulation. From marks on the throat the victim had been killed by choking." "—no trace of the assailant although police feel certain that it was a man."

There was a picture of Peggy Greene. She was blonde, older than Linda and well built and large of frame. In the dark with her light hair and in the swimmer's dress,

she could easily have been mistaken for the other girl. And she had been; there was the epitaph.

Mrs. Brumley was bustling with solicitude and "poor child." Linda was holding back the tears with an effort. George tried patting her shoulder. It seemed inadequate. He finally persuaded the girl to come with him down to the *Gazette* office.

"You don't want to sit around here all day going over and over this thing," he pointed at the paper on the table.

But they went over it going downtown. George forced an optimism he didn't feel.

"We can give the cops a steer on this thing," he opinionated. He tried to avoid saying, Obviously the big guy was after you.

But Linda Malolry got it. She turned to him.

"He's crazy, isn't he, George? Completely crazy. Some sort of strange perverted maniac."

"I don't know. I don't know what he is."

No matter what is the trouble with the rest of the world or with your own world, it helps to be in a big, impersonal office with a lot of people. You are caught up in the bustle and the activity. It is an intangible. It is *esprit de corps* and the power of suggestion, and no matter what your trouble, you feel better.

Linda did. Two hours after she was introduced to Department D, she was sitting there doing routine typing, listening to the gum-chewing redhead on the left of her complaining about her boy friend and laughing despite herself at the wisecracks of one of the office boys who kept popping in.

There was the other thing inside of her, the shock and the fear and the regret at losing a friend—perhaps she hadn't known the Greene girl long. Maybe it was only a month or so but still—but the feeling was deeper within her now.

George looked in two or three times that morning, noticed and was pleased. He had their lunches sent upstairs, and afterward he took her around, showing her some of the printing presses and the composition rooms.

Later that day she called her swimming club. She told them, as George had instructed, simply that she had had to move and that she'd come in within a week. They, in turn, passed on the information that there were a couple of letters for her and a persistent caller, a man who kept asking about her whereabouts.

"We've got him guessing." That evening George saw her straight home in a cab.

AT THE end of the week she persuaded him to let her go to the swimming club. He got some mid-afternoon time off for both of them.

"After all," she argued, "I'm supposed to be a swimmer. I have to practice once in a while."

There was a pool in the basement of the building. Linda glanced at her mail and then at George. He guessed what was coming. There was a leathery-faced, mannish-looking woman who had been fussing over her by the desk. He caught snatches like, "Neglecting your practice, my dear, and after such a promising beginning."

Linda said, "George, I ought to do a little practicing in the pool. It's perfectly all right here. You can stay or go, as you want. Isn't that okay?"

"I'll stay," he replied curtly.

The tank was in the basement level, a small twenty-yard pool, green-sided, white-tiled bottom. There were a few benches running down one side. On the other were two corridors, one leading to the stairs from above and the other leading to the dressing and shower rooms. He sat down on one of the benches and stretched his long frame.

The water was very clear and completely quiescent. He supposed later in the afternoon and the evening other girls came here. But now it was very lonely, and the yellow dome lights blinked down solemnly on him.

In a moment Linda came out in her bathing suit. The leathery-faced woman who had been introduced to George as the Association's swimming coach came and stood by the side of the pool and called down instructions as the girl swam up and down the tank, first slowly and then faster.

"You're rolling a little too much, dear. That's it."

George, less the perfectionist than old Leather Face, marveled at Linda's powerful, long strokes.

"That's fine," the coach clapped her hands. "Now you do a few dozen pool lengths."

The coach then beckoned to Pelgrim.

"There's something I'd like to speak to you about," she said in a low voice. "Not here. Come up to my office a moment."

George looked doubtfully back at Linda in the pool. She waved gaily to him. He followed the older woman up the stairs. She led him into a small, dingy office and closed the door. The walls were covered with photographs of girl swimmers.

"My girls," old Leather Face intoned proudly, "and you know, I really think Linda Mallory could be one of the best, but she hasn't been practicing enough. Oh my no, not nearly enough."

The woman fluttered on talking about Linda and swimming, and around the edges of several other subjects. Finally the reporter asked, "And what was it you wanted to speak to me about?"

The swimming coach reddened. Her hands waved in the air. Why, she's positively embarrassed, George realized.

"I think I'd better be getting back to the pool."

"No, no," she cried and laid a claw-like hand on his arm. She tried for a smile and fluttered some more. "You see, Linda should devote her entire time to swimming. She could really, well, I think she could really become very good. It's a great opportunity." The woman went on.

He agreed. "But I really think I ought to go back."

She protested feebly again. The transparent stall of the thing suddenly hit Pelgrim. He yanked at the door and started down the stairs to the basement two at a time.

He heard the woman following some steps behind.

The pool was empty, and its emptiness caught at his throat. He'd been upstairs how long? Ten, fifteen minutes, maybe a little longer. He turned to old Leathery Face, raging.

"Where's her room! Where's Linda Mallory's dressing room?"

She beckoned down the other corridor. "It's really all right. Now, don't get so excited, young man."

He pounded down the corridor.

"That one," she indicated to the left.

Everywhere else the dressing room doors were open showing emptiness, nothing but utter emptiness. Without knocking he flung open the one closed door. It, too, was completely empty. The older woman stood in the door behind him outside.

"Really, it's all right," she protested. "You're becoming much too excited.

"What's all right!" George yelled.

"She's with the gentleman," the coach insisted. "She's all right."

THE story poured out. This man who had phoned so often for Linda, and the time he'd come, admitting whimsically that as a suitor he was losing out to someone else. Would they . . . would they let him know the next time she came, phone him immediately?

"He gave me his number," Leather Face proclaimed, "and forced, positively forced a fifty-dollar bill on me." The memory of it still embarrassed her. "He was very persistent."

"What did he look like?" Pelgrim cried.

"Well, not what you'd really call attractive. No, really not at all. He was very large, big, almost fat, yes, fat. A large white face with very dark eyes, but he was very courteous to me."

George could see her remembering the fifty-dollar bill.

"And you think Linda left here with him of her own accord?"

"Why, of course. He was her fiancé, sort of. At least that's what I gathered."

"That's what you gathered!" George sneered, and he heard the strange sound of his own voice rising. "Just look in here a minute."

The woman came forward peering into the chamber, eyes bulging as though she expected to find a corpse.

"Her clothes!" Pelgrim thundered. "Her dress, all her things are here. You think she vanished, left this building of her own accord just in a bathing suit?"

The woman shook her head, amazement spreading across her face.

"Certainly he wouldn't risk taking her upstairs and out front that way. Is there a back entrance? Quick!"

The woman nodded and beckoned out the way they'd come. George found it. The way led to an alley beside the building. It

too was empty, but outside lying beside the brick wall was her bright-red bathing cap, a rubber seam split at one place as though it had been torn off. He picked it up, and without another word to the startled older woman still dogging his trail, he got into a cab and told the driver, "Take me to the nearest police station."

Sergeant Murphy was very helpful in that imperturbable, unconstructive way that police officials have in the face of any catastrophe. George gave a complete description of Linda, and as best he could, a complete description of the big man. The only factor that caused the vestiges of life to light small fires for a moment in the sergeant's face was mention that the abductee was abducted in a bathing suit.

"In a bathing suit, you say now!" That was Sergeant Murphy's sole contribution.

George left for home. He poured himself a stiff drink and another, then he remembered to phone the office and told them to transfer any calls to his apartment. George turned on the radio. He called the precinct. There was no news. He'd never before been a floor-pacer. But now he paced. It was doubly hard because it was his own fault for leaving her there.

That stupid fool of a woman mouthing on about the gentleman giving her a fifty-dollar bill! Not to know the name of the person he was seeking. Except that fifty-dollar bills don't grow on trees could mean he was rich, must mean he was well of.

At one-fifteen a.m. in the morning (George knew the time exactly because he'd just listened to the news on the radio), the knocking came at his door. The knocking was insistent, hysterical.

Pelgrim opened the door, expecting anything. The anything was Linda. She fell into his arms. Her knees gave way and she sagged to the floor. There was an old, tattered long coat around her and an ugly bruise on her cheekbone. She mumbled something to him about a taxi driver downstairs and she got out of the long coat. George got it.

"Will you be all right for a minute?"

SHE nodded but sat there on the floor where she'd collapsed. Her face was gray, her eyes circled with fatigue. He made sure the catch was on the door and felt it lock from the outside.

The cab driver was waiting skeptically and getting increasingly nervous.

"Hadn't ought to do it, mister. Hadn't of excepting your wife is so pretty." He accepted his long coat back gratefully.

George paid him the fare and a five-dollar tip, upon which the cabby grew loquacious.

"Ought to take better care of your wife, mister, beautiful girl like that. Masquerade party, she says to me. Some masquerade party, I says to myself! Going around the city in a bathing suit! It's none of my business, but if you ask me, mister!"

George left the driver still talking and hurried back into the building. In a moment he'd let himself back into his apartment. Her eyes were large with fear and glazed with shock. He pulled her over to his bed and hoisted her onto it. Then he called a doctor friend of his, a man who didn't mind being disturbed at this hour and wouldn't ask too many questions.

Linda said little. She was plainly exhausted. Dr. Allen, when he came, confirmed that.

"I've given her something to make her sleep." He punched his friend playfully on the shoulder. "What're you up to, George, my boy, and what's the swimming-suit stunt? After mermaids now?"

"She's all right?" Pelgrim was in no mood for jokes.

"She's okay. A good sleep will do it. She's got a nasty bruise on her cheekbone there. I'd hate to see whatever she bumped into."

After Allen had left, George tiptoed in and saw that Linda was sleeping. He shut the door quietly and then curled up on the living-room sofa.

She slept late, and before he heard the first stirrings from her room, he'd already put together some breakfast and phoned the office saying she wouldn't be in and he'd be late. When he took coffee and toast in to her, he was pleased at how much better she looked, although the cheekbone was still ugly.

She had a hearty, "Hi, what goes here!" for him.

"You mean you don't remember?" he came back.

She didn't shake her head but she looked doubtful, just this side of shaking her head. Then she clenched her hands together tightly.

"Yes," her voice was low. "Yes, I do remember. I remember all of it, George, and I don't want to."

He didn't like the look on her face and he chattered quickly about something else and got some coffee into her. He told her to stay put, not to answer the door or even the telephone unless it rang in a simple code he explained to her. Then he went out.

The Civil Administration offices of the city were not unfamiliar to him. He'd been there before on stories. Once there'd been a conference in the mayor's chambers. Another time, when the Commissioner of Police had been sworn in. The Commissioner, George remembered, was a tall man with the erect carriage of the military and a bristly gray mustache, a rather fine-looking man.

WAITING in the anteroom, George rehearsed in his mind what he was going to say. It was unusual, of course, to take a complaint to the Commissioner, but he felt under the circumstances it was justifiable. He wasn't at all averse to cashing in on a public officials's desire to please representatives of the press. A good press often elects public officials and sympathetic reporting is a good press. Anybody from the lowest ward-heeler on up knows this.

He would state it simply, "Mister Commissioner, I realize this is rather an extraordinary case, but this acquaintance of mine" —and he would outline the situation, ending up with a description of the big man. The Commissioner would listen politely, and at the very least, there would be some sort of alarm or alert posted to pick up this character at least for questioning.

George waited. And then the door to the Commissioner's office opened. The Commissioner himself walked out. But George's eyes were not for his erect bearing and the neatly trimmed gray mustache. Instead they were caught and fascinated by the Commissioner's companion. The hugeness, the dark, rumpled suit. . . .

The two men shook hands fervently and then the dark-suited monster lumbered past Pelgrim as though he hadn't seen him, and out of the offices.

The Commissioner beckoned to the stunned reporter, frowning as he did so. The frown stayed put when they sat down inside. George's mouth was dry. His throat was tight. Words wouldn't come. Nothing came. Instead, the Commissioner spoke from out of the frown.

"Now, Mister Pelgrim. You are Pelgrim of the *Gazette*, of course?"

George managed to nod. The Commissioner went on:

"Ah, yes, of course I remember you. Please don't tell me you've come here to make a complaint!"

George was immobile. The Commissioner waved one hand.

"We all make mistakes. Of course, I don't want to embarrass you with a recital of what you know only too well, for the fact remains that Mr. Remsdorf—er, you just saw him leaving—er—has just made a a complaint against you! He told me just now that going by your conduct of the last few months, you would probably be following him here!" The Commissioner made another wave in the air with his hand.

"He did say you might probably lodge a complaint against him." The Commissioner smiled as though this last contingency was so utterly ridiculous that no other facial reaction could satisfy it.

"There's a girl, I know," the Commissioner continued.

George started to speak but the official motioned him to silence.

"I know, I know how these misunderstandings come up. But I would suggest under the circumstances that you back out of this situation gracefully. I, of course, don't like to take any action on behalf of the city or the Police Department against you or speak to your employer."

"Who is he?" George finally got out.

The Commissioner looked surprised. "You don't know? That's Lother Remsdorf, Jr!"

The name went around in Pelgrim's mind and then the lights came on. Lother Remsdorf, Sr., had been the brilliant experimentalist and multi-millionaire who owned the huge place up on Grandview Avenue, some plantations in the South, coal ore, timber

and vast real-estate holdings. Remsdorf, Jr., could buy and sell Commissioners of Police.

"What does he charge me with?" George asked, tight-lipped.

"Now, now, Mister Pelgrim. This can all be done with a minimum of dramatics and without any great loss to yourself. There are, you know"—with what he meant to be a witty smile—"other girls in the world. Just leave Mr. Remsdorf's fiancée alone! I make myself clear, I hope."

THE next few days were tortuous. Linda had regained her physical strength, and slowly the shock of her experiences with Remsdorf had passed. George learned about it bit by bit, not wanting to force her. How the big man had appeared from nowhere soon after George had gone upstairs with the swimming coach. He had grabbed her before she could escape into the pool again and forced her out the back way.

They'd driven for a long time in his long, black, expensive limousine, chauffered by some sort of liveried South American, she thought.

He told her a strange tale about himself and about her and where, like a crossword puzzle, their two destinies fitted together. He'd said quite candidly, she recalled the story to Pelgrim, that he wasn't the same as other men.

She'd listened to him with growing horror as he'd talked, not wanting to accept what he said, her eyes fascinatedly watching the drops of moisture on the backs of his huge, fleshly hands, and she remembered that when he'd touched her, his hands were wet as though *he* had been in swimming and not she.

The prosaic, matter-of-fact way he presented what he averred was the scientific truth about himself made the revelations even more horrible. Linda had sat huddled in the corner of his huge sedan, stunned, speechless.

Finally he'd driven to the family town house on Grandview Avenue. He'd helped her inside. Helped was hardly the word, for his giant hand had closed over her forearm and she sensed that he would have wrenched it out of the socket before he would have let her escape. And where could she go? The impossibility of fleeing down a city street in a bathing suit!

He'd talked to her in the large house, as silent and imperturbable as its servants who came and went with drinks and food which she assiduously avoided touching. He drank, she noticed, huge quantities of liquids, beakers of milk, glasses and glasses of water and assorted liquers.

Finally, it was some time later that night, he'd sat dozing and looking water-logged before her, surrounded by empty glasses. She'd gathered her strength and run off down the corridors of the old monstrous house. She'd heard him come awake, the sound of a bell being rung, undoubtedly to summon the servants, and then his huge flapping weight coming after her in pursuit.

Thankfully, she'd found a door, and just as his nightmare shape rounded a corner behind her, she burst into the street, unmindful of her appearance. It was then she'd found a taxi, and brokenly told her story. It was any story then, that she'd been at a masquerade, and given George's address.

PELGRIM listened, half disbelieving some of the time but the terror had been a valid thing stamped on her face, as real as the bruise where the big man had struck her when he'd dragged her struggling from the pool.

The days became weeks, and the weeks with their uneventfulness gratefully lent themselves to a growing feeling of security. Linda sensed it and thrived on it. The color came back into her pretty face. She'd continued on at Mrs. Brumley's and their routine was simple.

George picked her up every morning in a cab and they went to the *Gazette*. They went home again together at night, and in all that time they never once saw Remsdorf. In the first few days of that period of time, George had found out what he could about Lother Remsdorf, Sr. and Jr. The father had been a brilliant scientist. No less an authority than Carrel had called him "decades ahead of his time."

He'd had the brilliant analytical incisive and curious mind of the born experimentalist, plus the family heredity of vast wealth which allowed him to delve where he would, independent of the politics that surround the

monetary grants from scientific and medical institutions.

There were no limits, some experts felt, to the anthropological, biological and protoplasmic advances Remsdorf might have been able to make when the catastrophic explosion destroyed his mountain laboratory. Most of his equipment and all of his notes were obliterated, and no trace of Remsdorf, Sr., was ever found by searching parties who came to the lofty eyrie to search among the blackened ruins.

THERE was a son, though, to carry on the name—Lother Remsdorf, Jr. Although his interests were not, seemingly, concerned with science, he had supposedly a brilliant mind, and as direct and only heir was one of the three wealthiest men in the country. A man in his position could purchase almost anything he wished from property to human lives to do with, to distort or destroy, as he willed.

Pelgrim felt a vast futility in those first few days, but as time passed and Linda grew more cheerful, he, too, had hopes that they had seen the last of the big man. With the months came early winter, and that past spring and summer seemed like some half-forgotten evil story laid in the distant past.

Linda's work at the paper had gone on, but one day she came to George, her eyes bright. It was the Southern Indoor Swimming Meet, the last of the season. She wanted to compete.

"I know I've neglected my practice," she admitted, "but I'd like to try. George, that awful business is behind us now. Don't you think it's all right?"

He said he thought so, but somehow the association with swimming bothered him. He wangled the assignment from his editor, and a week later they were on the train, Linda's entry acceptance in her handbag.

The trip to the southern city was an overnight hop. George saw Linda safely into her lower berth. Her upper was occupied by an elderly woman going to visit her son, while George had an upper across the aisle.

His desire for a cigarette before turning in took the reporter to the rear of the train. The observation car was empty at this hour except for a porter counting up tips. Pelgrim pushed open the door onto the observation platform and fumbled his way in the darkness to a seat. He cupped his hands over a match to light his cigarette. He inhaled deeply and then blew the smoke out into the currents of air that rushed passed.

It was quiet as a railroad car can be with its rhythmical clicking of wheels, quiet enough so that when a voice said, "Good evening, Mr. Pelgrim," George jumped as though at a revolver shot.

He turned his head and just made out the shape of someone sitting on the opposite rail of the platform. The tones and the shape were all too familiar. George let out air suddenly and a gasp that sounded like, "You!" The revolver he'd gotten the license for several months ago was back inside in his suitcase.

"Please don't say anything as prosaic as that I'm following you," the big man chuckled, "or I shall have to suggest to the authorities that quite the reverse is true. How is Miss Mallory?"

"She's—she *was* all right," George said angrily, rising to his feet. He stood at the entrance door looking down at Lother Remsdorf. "I don't care who you are! I'm going to get rid of you, do you understand?"

But this heated denunciation only caused the big man to chuckle more.

"I mean to have her, Mr. Pelgrim, in spite of all your efforts. You see, she and I, our destinies are together to start a new race. Ah, but there I go. You wouldn't understand." His voice took on a brittle hardness. "She'll be mine or she will not be at all! As for your worries about who I am, well, let that be subordinate, Mr. Pelgrim. I would suggest you worry about *what* I am!"

George left the platform raging at the sound of laughter behind him. He got into his berth and lay there the rest of the night while the clicking wheels counted off the miles and the hours, and he thought and wondered and thought some more, always ending up at an impasse.

THE next morning he transferred the revolver from his suitcase into his pocket. He'd planned to say nothing about Lother Remsdorf to Linda, but getting off the train, she spotted the big man alighting two cars down. The hugeness, the bulk, the dark rumpled suit, these characteristics were not

to be mistaken. Nor were they lost on the girl. She lunged against Pelgrim.

"Dear God," she almost cried, "aren't we ever to be free of him? He's turned up again, George! What can we do?"

He tried to quiet her, to soothe her. Their hotel was a small one, and George made sure there was no Remsdorf registered there.

The next evening at the Indoor Championships, though, the big man was seated prominently in a front-poolside seat. George wondered at Linda's courage. From his perch in the press row, he could see her strained face, her eyes drawn almost as though hypnotized to the dark bulk sitting, watching her implacably.

In the finals her start was poor as though she were preoccupied with something else and hardly heard the gun. She swam courageously and splendidly, making up most of the lost ground. It was Remsdorf and Remsdorf alone that cost her first place. As it was, she came in second a foot or so behind the leader.

Later in her hotel, the girl came close to hysteria. The medal presentations were scheduled for the next day.

"We've got to get out of here, George," Linda insisted. "I'm so terribly afraid of him."

He agreed. They packed hurriedly and left by a back way. The small southern town was filled with visitors attracted by the aquatic show. In spite of the chill air a carnival spirit pervaded the streets. George found a cab and pushed Linda inside, directing the driver to the station.

The first time he turned around and looked out the back window, there was nothing suspicious. The second time he thought they were being followed. When they pulled into the railroad terminal, he was sure. He threw a bill at the driver, grabbed their luggage and hustled the girl into the waiting room. A last glance had showed another cab trundling down the street towards the station.

The ticket agent blinked at him sleepily. "Now, don't be so excited, young man. The next express for the North doesn't come through here for better than two hours yet. Can't understand why you Yankees are so goldarn anxious to get back up to that blighted country!"

The other cab had stopped in the driveway. George pushed Linda out the door that led to the platform. The tracks gleamed coldly under the occasional electric bulbs. They hurried up the platform a way, and then Pelgrim, looking back, saw the oblong of light when the station door opened. Still, they couldn't be seen by someone coming out of the lighted waiting room.

"We'll cut across the tracks," he muttered. "It's the only way."

IT WAS flight now, blind hysterical flight to get away. Months long the pursuit had lasted, its tempo increasing. He helped Linda as her heels caught in the ballast underneath the ties. Four tracks, eight rails they stumbled across, and then there were bushes and shrubs, thankfully on the other side.

"You know where we're going?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, but I remember when we came here there was an airfield not far from the station."

They pushed on through the wooded area. Almost at the same time that they saw the circular beacon in the sky ahead of them, they both detected the sounds of pursuit, heavy, methodical tramping, unmistakably the sounds of a big person following them.

"Go on!" George panted to Linda, and the scene was faintly reminiscent of that other time months earlier in the city. "Go on, you can make it. I'll follow."

He wanted to keep both bags, but she insisted on taking one. She was gone then into the darkness. Her lips brushed his cheek. She murmured, "I don't want to leave you," and he ordered her roughly away, "I'm running this for better or worse." She saw the revolver in his hand and she understood.

The minutes passed, more time than he'd dared to hope for. She was well away by now, nearly to the municipal airport, he thought. And then out of the shrubbery loomed Lother Remsdorf, the clothes on his huge bull-like body more rumpled than ever, hands hanging at his sides, his black hat clamped tight on his head.

He came forward slowly, and what light there was reflected from the stars and the sky glanced off the dull barrel of Pelgrim's revolver.

"Now will you leave us alone?" the reporter snarled between clenched teeth. "Will you go back the way you've come and never bother us again?"

The laughter started then inside the big man, deep inside, and it grew to a gurgling sound to hear. The giant hands were raised and the first menacing step forward was taken when George fired.

He was aiming squarely at the gigantic middle, and at the range of only several paces, he couldn't have missed. Remsdorf lurched on towards him and the slobbering sound of his laughter seemed to beat down on the reporter. George fired again and again, but the monster kept coming.

Two more shots, and then with one chamber left, Pelgrim raised his revolver, pointed it squarely at the hideous white swollen face looming before him. He pulled the trigger and saw the course of the bullet in the man's face. Remsdorf shook his head then and stopped, but Pelgrim was as though rooted to the spot, fascinated.

THE big man was still grinning, and one hand came up and touched cheek. The hole there was apparent, but what was oozing out, slowly, thickly, almost like honey, was not blood. It could not be blood for it was not red. It was a neutral-colored liquid, strange and terrible to see as it was inexplainable. An almost whitish, thick serum-like substance.

"You've water in you, not blood," the reporter screamed involuntarily. "You're not human. . . ."

Almost imperceptably the gigantic head nodded, as though in mute, mirthful agreement. . . .

George turned and ran then. Ran as fast as he could, as long as he could. There was somewhere in the back of his consciousness the youngster-thought that this could not be and that he would wake up and find it was dream-stuff, but he had enough presence of mind to shove the empty revolver in his coat pocket as he came onto the municipal airport field.

She was beckoning to him and they got on a flight to the North. He couldn't speak for gasping, but they sat huddled together while the plane filled. The minutes ticked away and Linda kept murmuring, her head against his shoulder, Why didn't they leave, why didn't they leave? He held her head there because he was too tired to do anything else and because he didn't want her to see who had just gotten into the plane, their plane. . . . grinning still. . . . A man with six bullets in him. A man?

They flew into the night and into the dawn, and all the time George could feel, without looking, those eyes on them from the rear. Linda slept against his shoulder fitfully and he brushed her golden hair gently over her eyes.

The flight ended at a Northern airport and the two disembarked groggily with little fight left in them. Remsdorf was close behind.

It was one of those vagaries of Fate that made George look towards the Canadian plane warming up in the next runway. On the spur of the moment he bought two tickets, and in fifteen minutes they were flying north again, but no more alone, no more unpursued than they had been before.

George had a relative in this certain Canadian town, towards which they headed, an uncle of some influence locally but who could not be expected to contribute to their problem concretely. It was only the impulse to keep going that had driven Pelgrim on. Linda was too cold and too tired to care any longer.

IT WAS beginning to snow when they landed in the northern Canadian airport. George got Linda into a hack. The faithful Remsdorf was close behind in another. They got out at his uncle's address, leaning together for support. The snow was heavier and the wind was freezing.

George looked for his uncle's name on the doorbells. There was nothing. Frantically he pushed "Superintendent." Remsdorf's trailing cab stopped outside, and the big man got out across the street. George hoped he froze in his rumpled dark suit, got sick, dropped dead, anything.

The superintendent shoved a bleary face around the door jamb.

"He's not here any more. He's moved. He's ten blocks or so up the street."

He scribbled an address for Pelgrim and handed it to him. The two started out again, heads bent against the storm. The snow had

all but stopped as the mercury tumbled even lower, but the going was bad and the wind ferocious. Linda's teeth chattered as they trudged on, endlessly it seemed.

The final half of the way led through a small park, deserted in this weather. The big man was still behind them, George saw when he craned his head, but there was something newly strange.

"What is it?" Linda's fingers dug into Pelgrim's arm.

"It's all right," George reassured. "Let's just keep going," but his head was still craned backward.

The big man was walking staggeringly, stiffly. He seemed to be trying as hard as before to keep up with them, but his steps were clumsy even for him.

They had almost reached the other side of the park when George saw Remsdorf stagger and put his great hands out to clutch at a bench. He eased himself stiffly into it like a very old, old man with rheumatism.

George turned his head away and there was the address ahead. Soon they were inside out of the bitter weather and his uncle, small, gray as ever, was clucking over them like a mother hen. Linda was put to bed immediately in the guest room with a hot-water bottle and a pint of spiked hot tea.

George talked with his uncle for a while, grateful that the older man didn't press him for reasons.

"I know you newspaper fellows," his relative wagged, "always up to some kind of scalawag, looking for stories. Son, you ought to turn in now. You look pretty tuckered."

George assured him he would but said no, certainly he wouldn't take the older man's bed. He'd sleep outside here.

By midnight the house was quiet. George tiptoed to the front closet and took out a greatcoat. Then as silently he let himself out the front door.

The night was bright with snow and clear with the zero temperature. He made his way into the barren and deserted park. He walked down the path they'd taken earlier until he came to the desolate bench set by the way. There was Remsdorf, no longer grinning, sitting fixedly. The reporter's thoughts went back to the water-substance that had flowed from the monster's wound where red blood should have been.

George came closer and his eyes bulged. It was too much, it was incredible, but Remsdorf's head under the black slouch hat, seemed a snowball, his hands were stiff claws of ice. Disbelieving, George took the revolver from his pocket, and with its barrel struck gently against one of the outstretched fingers. The tip broke off as easily as if this thing were a candy figure.

For Remsdorf was not of this world. He was frozen. He was dead. He was an ice man and no more!

The Eyrie and Weird Tales Club

WEIRDISMS INTRODUCED

THIS issue of WEIRD TALES introduces a new series of "picture-horrors" by Lee Brown Coye. We are calling this department "Weirdisms" and its first "evil manifestation" may be found on page 63 in this July Number.

The incomparable Lee Brown Coye has drawn the pictures while his able collaborator, E. Crosby Michel, has delved painstakingly into the tradition and legend

(*Continued on page* 62)

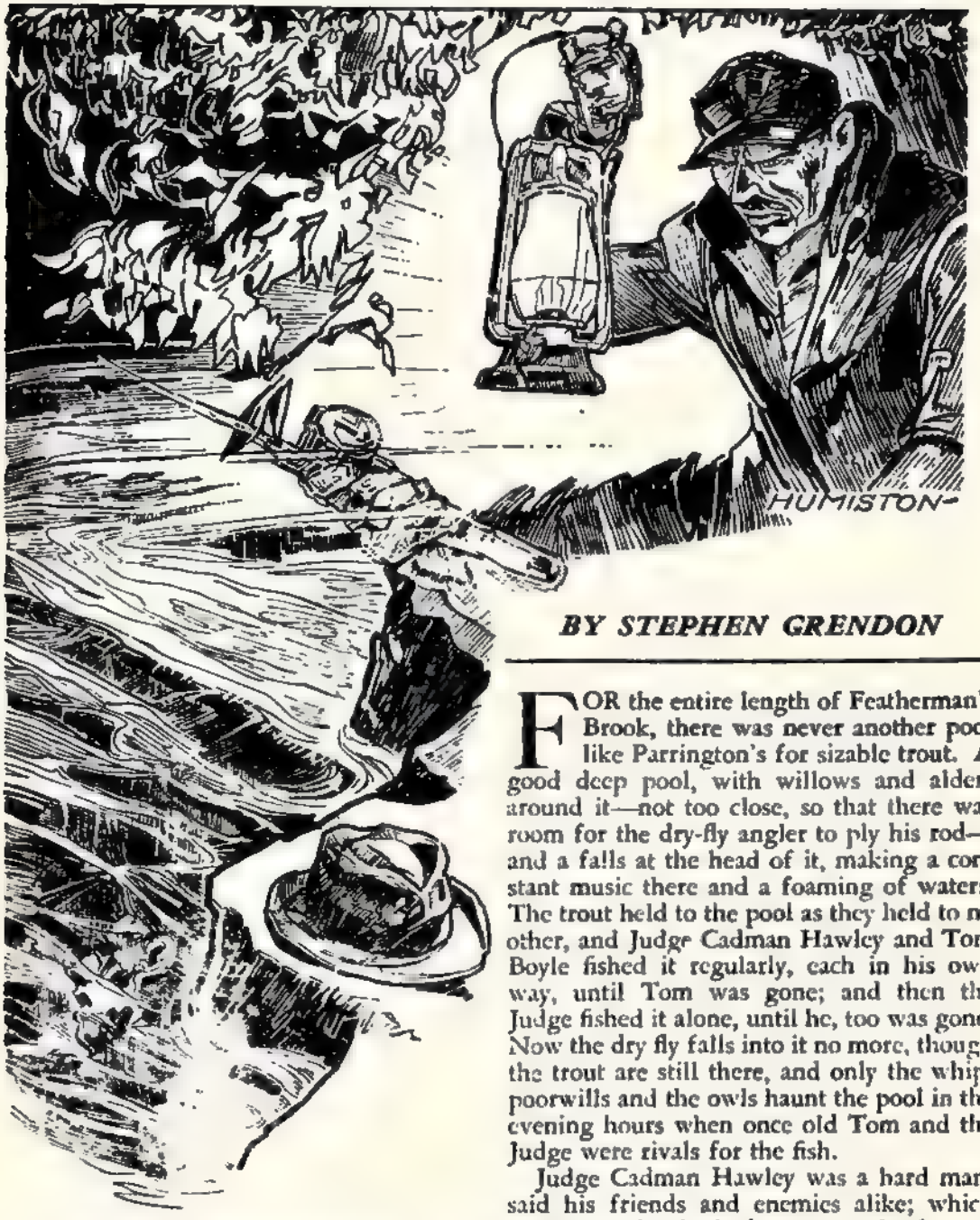
READERS' VOTE

THE CHURCHYARD YEW
THE WILL OF CLAUDE ASHUR
THE DAMP MAN
PARRINGTON'S POOL
INTERIM
THE DOG THAT CAME BACK
THE ROBE OF FORGETFULNESS
THE BREEZE AND I
THE DIGGING AT PISTOL KEY

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza New York City 20, N. Y.

Parrington's Pool



Heading by FRED HUMISTON

Tranquil was this place, holding on its surface not one hint of what lay beneath

BY STEPHEN GRENDON

FOR the entire length of Featherman's Brook, there was never another pool like Parrington's for sizable trout. A good deep pool, with willows and alders around it—not too close, so that there was room for the dry-fly angler to ply his rod—and a falls at the head of it, making a constant music there and a foaming of waters. The trout held to the pool as they held to no other, and Judge Cadman Hawley and Tom Boyle fished it regularly, each in his own way, until Tom was gone; and then the Judge fished it alone, until he, too was gone. Now the dry fly falls into it no more, though the trout are still there, and only the whip-poorwills and the owls haunt the pool in the evening hours when once old Tom and the Judge were rivals for the fish.

Judge Cadman Hawley was a hard man, said his friends and enemies alike; which was to say that he had not a streak of senti-

ment in him, but hewed strictly to the letter of the law, and made the letter his interpretation. He lived by it, and said he meant to die by it. He administered the law year after year with unqualified impartiality, deciding degrees of ownership and the precise quality of guilt. He severed marriage bonds when ample cause appeared to him, and refused to do so when he saw no cause, no matter what others thought of any case; he sent delinquent children to institutions of reform with commendable dispatch; he sentenced every petty criminal on the theory that swift and strong punishment might act as a deterrent in the future.

A hard man, according to the lights of those who knew him.

He set up a furor when he refused a divorce to Jed Marshall and his wife, after which Jed went home and in two days shot her; thereafter Jed went speedily to prison, and no hesitation about that. He invited criticism, which he scorned, when he sent one of the Gregory twins to the reformatory and let the other, who appeared equally culpable, go free. And when he took Tom Boyle's teen-age girl away from Tom, and castigated Tom as a no-good, drunken wastrel, there was some difference of opinion. Tom being drunk, certainly, from time to time, unruly, and a repeated offender, was not a man a young and growing girl ought to live with, true, but at least he loved his daughter, and she him. They were but two alone, and had no one else, and there was some question, by no means spurious, whether or not the Judge had taken this means to effect some petty vengeance because of Tom Boyle's superior qualities as an angler, a sport in the exercise of which Judge Hawley took an overweening pride.

HOWEVER, the girl was taken away and put into a home with "decent" folks, who worked her from morning until night and begrudged her the schooling she was able to get; while Tom moved in and out of the court and the jail and bemoaned his plight and threatened to avenge himself, in turn, and separate the Judge from that he loved the best, which was an idle threat, for the Judge loved nothing but himself, he loved his life better than anything apart from it, doing as he pleased—a hulk of a man, big in chest and belly, with a square jaw and gimlet eyes and bushy brows, giving him a ferocious but not entirely unkindly look, though Judge Hawley's kindnesses were always tempered with a fine interpretation of the legal aspects of any case in point.

AT LAST the Judge had his most earnest wish. Tom disappeared, and thus the ablest angler of the township was gone, and Judge Hawley had Featherman's Brook all to himself, for no one else in the vicinity knew the art of the dry fly, and none could hope to practise it as well and to such good effect as he. There were some who asked where Tom had gone, particularly his daughter, for his old hat was found on the edge of the brook near to Parrington's pool at the foot of the falls—the deepest in the brook, and by all odds, the widest, too—but the Judge disagreed with the popular verdict that Tom had drowned himself in his misery at being separated from the one person he loved, and would not permit the pool to be dragged, fearful that the trout would be too grievously disturbed, deciding with judicious finality that if indeed Tom had drowned himself, he would float in good time, and that was an end to it.

But Tom never came up, he never came back, his hat went to his daughter, and where he had gone no one knew. Judge Hawley pointed to his absence as evidence—if more were needed—of his wanton irresponsibility. But the Judge was a hard man, everyone knew that, and everyone accepted that for the fact, and there was no good in argument against it, for no argument would change it.

The Judge, however, had little pleasure in fishing Featherman's Brook all by himself. There was no more of his suddenly turning a bend toward his favorite pool and finding Tom Boyle there ahead of him with a nice creel of trout, a smirk on his face and an uncivil tongue in his head, enough to send him into a dither of rage, but likewise a sort of challenge which aroused the sporting instinct in him to some sort of answer; so there was no longer any reason or impulse to beat Tom Boyle at his game. Nor was there any more of coming upon that smell of sweet tobacco smoke Tom drifted out behind him, though several times the Judge fancied that

he smelled it, but in every case he was alone at the brook and nobody else in sight.

Day after day in the season the Judge fished the brook, driving up to Featherman's farm and leaving his car there, as had been his custom from the beginning of his fishing years, never failing to encounter old Whitney Featherman in the vicinity of his car on his return.

"How'd ye do today, Judge?" he asked each time.

"Middling fair, Whit. I guess the big ones are all gone."

"Not out of Parrington's, they ain't."

But never a big one did the Judge take out of Parrington's pool. Now and then a strike, and now and then a catch—just enough so that he knew there was something still left in the pool at the foot of the falls.

Old Featherman, however, grew queerer and queerer, always asking curious questions about Parrington's.

"Anybody else a-fishin' it today?"

"Nobody."

"Thought I seen someone headin' down that way."

"Nobody there. Fished it for an hour. Took out two fair ones."

And next time it was much the same, with the old man not half so interested in the content of his creel as he appeared to be in the contents of the Judge's face, standing next the car and watching with narrowed eyes.

"For sure nobody at Parrington's, Judge?"

"No one but me."

"Was a-walkin' by there not so long before you come. Coulda sworn someone was a-fishin' it. Whipped out his fly nice as you please."

"Take anything?"

"Not so's I could see it."

"What was he fishing?"

"Looked like a Parmachene Belle."

"Eh! Tom Boyle's fly. Whoever he was, he'd gone by the time I got there. I fished down from your pasture line."

Featherman's angler, whoever he might be, managed to elude Judge Hawley's vigilance for some time. No matter how early he recessed his court, the Judge could not encounter him.

But at last, fishing late one evening, he had a brief glimpse of him—a shabby, nondescript man, fishing at the far edge on the far side of Parrington's pool. A skillful angler, too, judged by the brief glance of him that he got, for he wielded his rod and line with singular ability, and placed his fly beautifully, so that the Judge was filled with anticipation of rivalry—perhaps a rival not as good as Tom Boyle had been, which suited Judge Hawley's nature, but no amateur. However, when he came around the falls, his fellow angler had gone. The Judge had a curious illusion in the gathering twilight that his near companion had left his hat behind, but this was not so, he saw at a more intense scrutiny of the farther shore. A trick of the growing dusk.

So it was the evening hour that the mysterious angler preferred, regardless of what old Featherman had said, and it was thenceforth the evening hour that the Judge meant to fish the brook. He confided to his farming host that he had caught sight of his angler.

"What did he have on?" inquired Featherman, his eyes narrowed.

"Brown clothes, I think."

Featherman nodded. "That's him. Same clothing all the time. He's a queer one, Judge. Gits away like a bird in the brush. Once he's there, next thing, he's gone. The other night but one—after you'd gone—he took a beauty out of Parrington's."

"How big?"

"I'd say four pounds. Biggest one come outa there in years."

"Two pounds would be more like it."

"Always at Parrington's, too. Never seen him above the falls. Never seen him at the Wilson pool. Never seen him down at Tallon's."

"Well, Parrington's always was the best."

"Didn't take him long to find that out, for a newcomer."

Nor did it, and that was a fact not to be gainsaid.

The Judge recessed court a little later and came out at four, began to fish Parrington's, and moved up to Wilson's pool, and on to Stuart's bend. By sundown, he came on back, fishing as he went. Once he saw his fellow angler from above the falls, and stood silently watching him. A neat turn of the wrist, the fellow had, and an effortless manner of whipping his rod and line back

and forth, drawing out just the right amount of line each time, and placing his fly with great skill. His face the Judge could not quite see, for his battered hat hid it. He had a familiar look, somehow, but he could be no one Judge Hawley knew.

Envious, the Judge moved quietly around the falls and came on down the slope, screened by the willows there. He heard the flicking lash of line in the water, the touch of sound—a minute splash—when the fly was placed—a kind of music of which he never tired, came out from behind the bush and saw the fly—a Parmachene Belle, right enough, just as Featherman had said—and saw the line, and, following it, saw the end of the rod, and following that, nothing. There was no one there. He looked back, startled. No rod, no line, no Parmachene Belle, not even a ripple in the water of Parrington's pool—nothing.

A finger of cold ran up his spine and was gone.

IN A MOMENT he swore. Someone was having him. There was unfortunately no crossing place to enable him to follow through the bushes on the far side, and the sound of the falls was too loud to permit the hearing of footsteps.

He fished the pool a while, took out one trout, and by that time the darkness had come down, and he was off.

Next night he tried again. A cool night for summer, with a hint of rain in the air. He followed the same pattern—fishing Parrington's pool first, and then moving up and coming back down. This time, however, he took the far side of the brook, and came down soundlessly behind the alders on the bank above the falls.

There he was, sure enough, and what a wrist he had! Out and back, out and back, out and back, and the fly placed just right, just in that dark place under the little bank from which he sometimes fished. Something rose to it, too, but was not hooked. Was he using a Parmachene Belle again? But it was too dim to see, dusk coming more quickly under a sky of clouds.

He came out boldly to the head of the falls and called, "You, there. I'm coming down. I want to talk to you."

Singularly direct and forthright, as always. Thereupon, he moved down, keeping an eye on his fellow angler, who had not turned his head at the sound of his voice, had not, indeed, given any sign of having heard, much to the Judge's annoyance. But, watching or not watching, of a sudden he was gone. One moment there, off the next—just as old Featherman had said.

This time, however, Judge Hawley was ready. There was but one way he could have gone—straight back through the fringe of bushes to the pastureland beyond, and out across the edge of Featherman's to the road. The Judge hurled himself through the bushes and burst out into the pasture, looking eagerly in the direction his fellow angler must take.

No one there. Nothing.

Irate, he marched to Featherman's.

"Seen anything of him?" he asked.

"That one in brown clothes?"

"Yes."

"Not a smitch. Never seen him anywheres but Parrington's."

"Damn it, Man! He just came through ahead of me."

"Didn't see him. I was standin' here all the time, too, expectin' you."

The Judge was baffled, but resolved to waylay his fellow angler on the next night.

THE day was trying, however, and court held longer. There were several annoying cases, and old Tom Boyle's daughter, Jennie, now come of age, had appeared and demanded that some search be made for Tom, just a year gone. He had had difficulty in putting her off, and there were bitter words between them, in addition to tears from her and some acidulous comments from him, thwarted in his eagerness to reach the pool below the falls.

But at last he got there, on the edge of night.

No one was there. He put his rod together, put on a Royal Coachman, and tried his luck. The evening was quiet and beautiful. No wind blew, no cloud lay in heaven, and the even-song of birds rose all around to mingle with the pleasant babble of the falls—robins, mourning doves, wood thrushes, killdeers—and even one lone whippoorwill's voice rising. Wild ginger grew in the lowland, and bellwort nodded along the pool.

The dark water gave off the face of heaven here and there, and reflected the trees where the falls' descending waters did not break the surface save in ripples. Its foam was white and spectral in the growing dusk.

He took off his Royal Coachman and put on a Parmachene Belle.

He placed it on the dark water just under the bank—his favorite spot—and a favorite, too, with many a trout. The line made a faint singing where it flicked through the air, back and forth, and the hush of water about the fly, struck and drawn away, rose distantly against the talk of the falls.

He looked around him from time to time, but saw no one.

He moved to a higher bank, and tried again.

This time the rise came—and by what sight of it he had in the failing light, a sockdolager! a monster trout!—a long whiteness leaping to the surface, breaking water, vanishing with the Parmachene Belle. The line leaped out and down. Judge Hawley, tingling with excitement, gave further line until he felt it slacken; then he began to reel it in, cautiously at first, then with increasing confidence. The trout had gone down to the bottom, and there he lay now in some dark hole, falsely secure until the tautening line and the pull upon his mouth told him how unsafe he was.

The line tautened. Judge Hawley set the reel and drew back steadily. But the line pulled back with equal steadiness and equal strength. The Judge altered his grip and almost lost his rod. His hat fell off. He did not care. The rod bent and bent. He reached to release the line again, lost his footing, and plunged into the dark water of the pool.

Instantly, as at a fly flicked to the surface, the water was broken by the upward leaping of not one, but two habitants of the pool—slender and white—avid for the Judge; there was a fount of water and a tremendous threshing, and the Judge went under, washing water to all banks of the pool.

The whippoorwill, shocked at this frothing invasion of his dark domain, called once more uncertainly, and then was still.

AT LAST, the hour being well past nine o'clock, and the Judge's car still in his yard, Whitney Featherman went out to look for him, his bobbing lantern marking his route. He made his way up and down the brook, calling from time to time.

No answer.

He arrived finally at the Judge's hat and, fearful of what might have happened, he loped back to the house and telephoned to town.

There came then men with more lanterns, with nets and a boat or two, and this time there was no question about what must be done. Trout or no trout, Parrington's pool must be dragged, and the great hooks went into the depths.

They dragged it in the lantern-lit darknes, and by midnight brought up the rod and line—and what the line was wrapped around — Judge Hawley, and a crush of bones tight about his throat, tight against his chest, bones still in a water-soaked, partly shredded brown coat that was Tom Boyle's old fishing jacket, by the look of it—and a belt of that coat, still fairly preserved, lined on one side with what was left of dry flies, some of them stuck like gaff-hooks into Judge Hawley—Parmachene Belles, a full dozen of them, made by Tom's hand more than a year ago.

The Eyrie and Weird Tales Club (*Continued from page* 57)

of each grisly subject. We think these two have done a fine job; and we guess you're going to think so too.

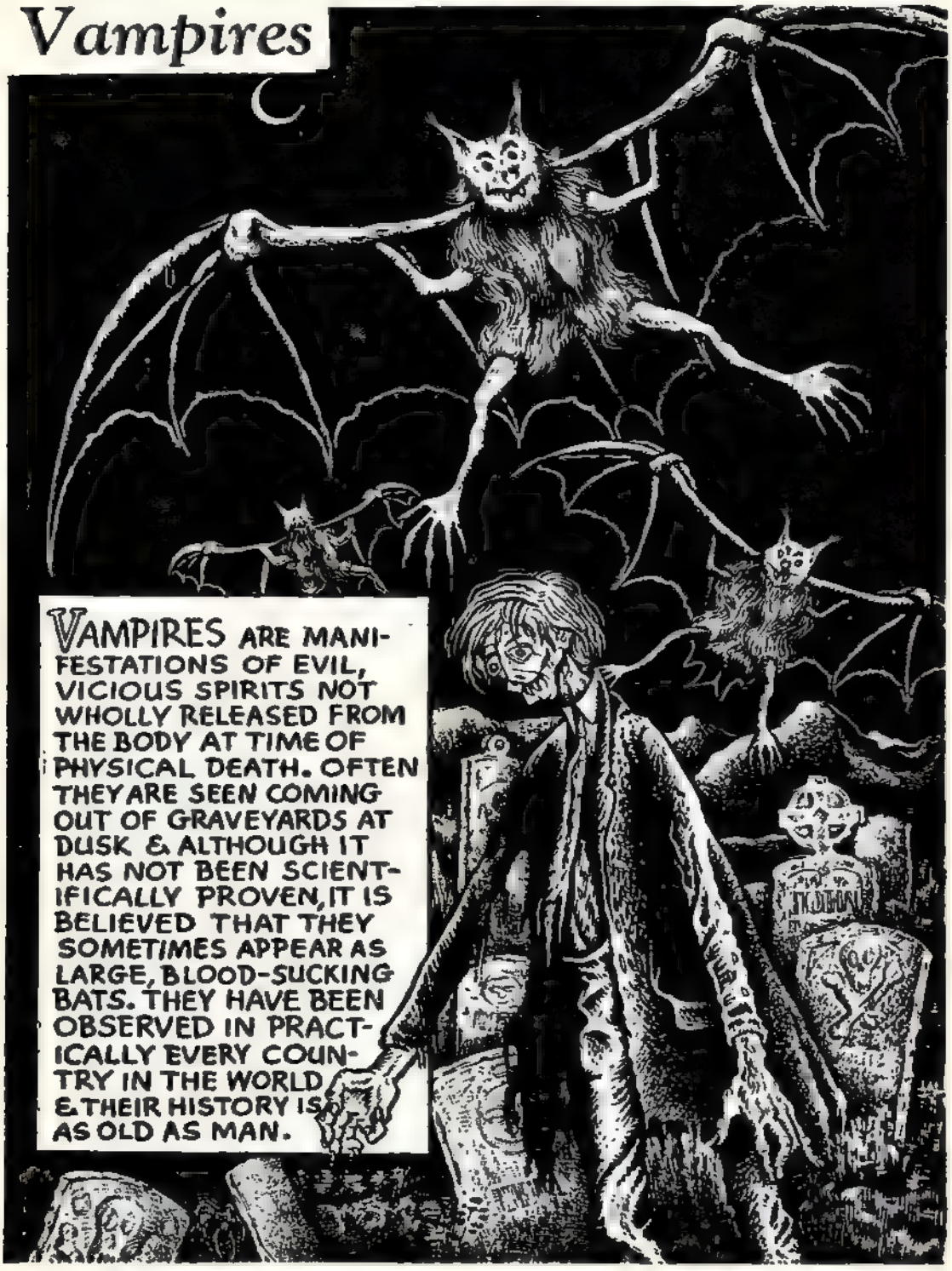
The macabre "wouldn't-want-to-meet-him-in-a-dark-alley" gent on our cover will be recognized, if not as someone you know, as the *smiling* hero of our first "Weirdisms" inside. You can look forward to following him through three subsequent adventure-installments of the Vampire Cycle. Then WEIRD TALES "Weirdisms" will go on to new horrors.

We here and Lee Brown Coye would like to know what you think of "Weirdisms" no less than Herbert, he of the frizzy hair and the two front, er, teeth. We warn you, Herbert is not the sort who'll take no for an answer!

WEIRDISMS

Drawings — Lee Brown Coye Legend — E. Crosby Michel

Vampires



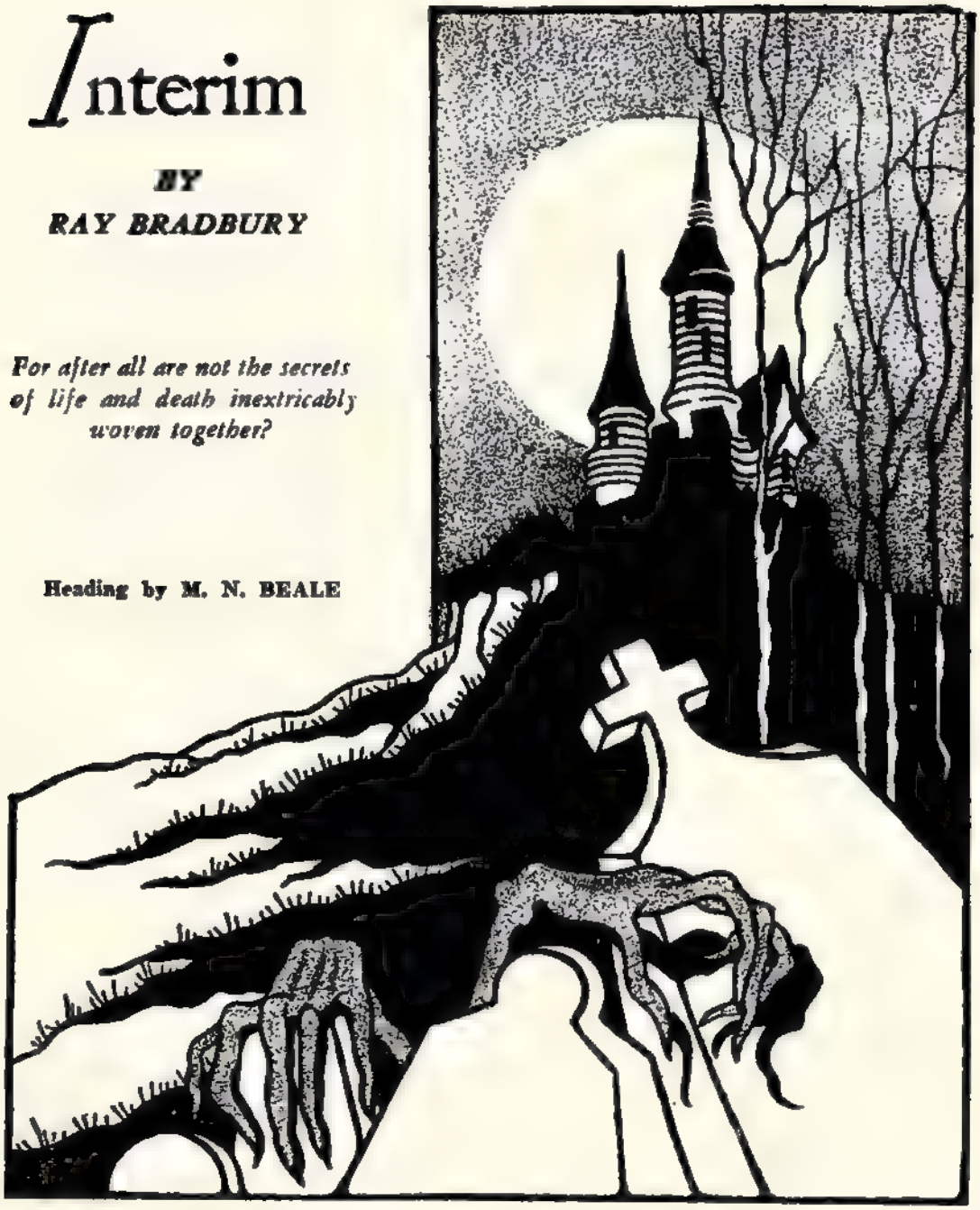
Interim

BY

RAY BRADBURY

For after all are not the secrets of life and death inextricably woven together?

Heading by M. N. BEALE



THE rustle went through the land from one end to the other; and the land was not very large — being bounded on the east and west by poplars, sycamores and great oaks and shrubs, and held on north and south by wrought iron and mortared brick. From one end of this land to the other, shortly before dawn, the rustling traveled. One bird, about to sing, silenced itself, and there was a kind of dim pulsing and a whispering under the earth.

The coffins, each a womb for silent, stiffened contents, each deep, each separate, were being slowly and certainly beat upon. The lids and sides of the deep boxes gave off slow, even, muffled beats.

The earth bore each sound on and on. It started at one dark box and the code beat and beat, passing on to the next box where a new, tired dry hand would repeat the message slowly and tiredly. So it went, until the deep-buried ones all heard and slowly began to understand.

After a time it was like a great heart beating under the earth. The systolic murmuring continued as the sun readied itself beyond the horizon.

The bird upon the tree crooked its bead-eyed head, waiting.

The heart beat on.

"Mrs. Lattimore."

Slowly and painfully the beating spelled out the name.

(She was the one buried up on the north end, under the moss-tree, a year ago, just before the planned birth of her child, remember her? *so* pretty, she was!)

"Mrs. Lattimore."

The heart-beat pounded, dim and far under the compressed sod.

"Have," asked the heart-beat sluggishly. "You," asked the heart-beat tiredly. "Heard," it asked. "What," it asked. "Is happening," it continued. "To her?" it concluded.

The heart-beat paused dramatically. And the thousand cold contents of a thousand deep boxes waited for the answer to the slow, slow, beating question.

The sun hung just beyond the far blue hills. The stars shone coldly.

Then, evenly, quietly, slowly, beat after beat, systolic thudding upon thudding, the answer to the question sounded. The land trembled with it, and repeated it, again and again, pounding and pounding away into a shocked and buried silence.

"Mrs. Lattimore."

The pulsing deep under.

"Will have."

Slowly, slowly

"Her child today."

And then a quick, amazing staccato, as of a thousand hands battering the lids in questioning hysteria:

"What'll it possibly be like? How can this thing be? What will it resemble? Why? Why? Why!"

The pounding faded. The sun rose.

Deep under, as the bird sang, deep under the stone where Mrs. Lattimore's name appeared, there was a scrabbling and a twisting and a strange sound from her buried, earth-moist box.

The Robe of Forgetfulness

BY ROGER S. VREELAND

YOU love her, don't you! Yes, I know. I have been in love too and been rejected. But you'll get over it, just as I have. Oh, please! No need to be startled like that! It isn't hard to read your mind. Let's have another drink. No —on me. Slide over your glass. There.

Yes, I'm a stranger to you now, but you'll get to know me, I'm sure. Ah, my friend, I don't like that sadness in your eyes. Yes, I know. We cannot always choose between sorrow and joy. Only those

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

A robe hides a variety of both benefactions and sins

who cause it can take it away—the women we love. But cheer up, my friend. You can't *make* her love you. Neither can I. But I can do something else to help you. I can make you forget her. I know, you don't want to. You do and you don't.

Let's take a walk. Get out into the air—the fresh air. A little liquor is all right, but what I have is better. Shall we stroll toward Maple Grove? It's pleasant that way. As I was saying, I can help you. I can—oh, please! Don't be startled. I know my clothes seem queer, especially this black robe. Nor can you understand why I talk like this. But, listen to me. Mark my words well. You *will* understand, my friend. You very definitely will.

Are we going right? Toward Maple Grove? I thought so. Ah! pardon my amusement. But it is strange, isn't it, how you want to resist going with me—but can't. Never mind. It is the only course to take. As I said, I have been in love too. And been rejected. Here, however, is a bit of consolation, my friend. Only those whose love is genuine can receive the help I have for you. Oh, so many people think they are in love, yet know nothing whatever of that profound combination of passion and tenderness such as you and I have known.

I must tell you about myself. I was in love, long ago, with a damsel whose name was Nora Grant. Nora possessed the rarest sort of beauty. In form, in face, and in character she was exquisite. Or so she seemed to me. Perhaps it was just because I loved her. But I was a diffident sort of chap. I didn't press my suit too hard at first. Chiefly, I guess, because I never expected her to take me seriously. Courtship in those days was more formal than it is now. But Nora did seem to show more and more fondness for me, or so I thought. Finally I determined to ask her to marry me. That summer evening I went to her house bent on proposing stands vividly before me. She was sweet to me as usual. As soon as we were alone I grew bold and asked her to become my wife. For a moment I misinterpreted the look of surprise that came into her face. Then it was as though cold steel had pierced my heart. She blurted: "Marry you? Oh, I couldn't do that! You are much too old!"

Well, my friend, I was just as you are. And when I walked home early that evening, I knew for the first time what a heavy heart was. I was hurt, angry. So I was too old for her! Too old! Yes, I was thirty! I was no longer a young man! And with each year I would grow older, and my chances of marrying and living a happy normal life would diminish. My youth had slipped away before I had a chance to enjoy it! I was wrong, of course, but that's how I felt.

I wasn't a drinking man. But this night I sought the nearest tavern. I sat at the bar set upon drowning my troubled soul in alcohol. Barely had I gulped down my first drink when I became aware of the stranger sitting next to me. That is all. I was *aware* of him. It was one of those unusual perceptions that one feels for no conscious reason. He was silent, still, and I sensed without looking directly at him that he was dressed in black. Impulsively I turned to look at him, and I started when I saw that his black eyes were leveled unwaveringly upon me. Something made me feel that he knew what was going on inside me, and I felt too that he was sympathizing with me.

HIS face was pale, his nose straight, and his lips thin and ever so slightly curved at the corners. And there was a strange quality to his skin that made it impossible to judge his age.

"You are in trouble," he said.

I nodded. I wasn't surprised. I had no doubt that melancholy was conspicuous on my face.

"I can help you," he went on. "There is no need to let a woman make you miserable."

Now I was surprised. Why was he sure my trouble concerned a woman? I smiled. "Perhaps you are reading my thoughts," I suggested facetiously.

"Perhaps," he replied, nodding his head slowly.

"That is interesting," I said as I put some coins on the bar and turned to leave. I was in no mood either to carry on an idle conversation or pour my soul out to a stranger. There were other taverns.

"Wait," he insisted. "While I can't

make Nora love you, I can help you forget her!"

I turned upon him. *Nora?* For an instant I was viciously resentful. Then overwhelmingly curious. "Who are you?" I demanded. "What do you know of Nora?"

HIS lips spread, curled thinly at the ends and for the first time he allowed his eyes to rove over my face. "We can't talk here," he said. "Come with me." He got up and started for the door.

I followed. It was dusk, as it is now. And, curiously enough, the moon was rising, as it is now.

(Are you sure this is right for Maple Grove? Somehow it seems different. But there are so many changes nowadays).

Well, we went toward Nora's house. It was more than a half hour's walk, and by the time we got within sight of it night had fallen and the moon was well in the sky. I remember how suddenly the atmosphere seemed to change. I became terrified, distrusted my acquaintance, feeling toward him very much as you are feeling toward me just now.

I was surprised to see her house completely dark. There was something mysterious about the whole night. It was veiled in gossamer laces, ground mists of shifting strata suspended in a flood of silvery moonlight, giving the effect of being under water. Though merely a clearing along a forest road, the dim trees stretched vaguely into the moonlit mist like huge marine growth. And thick silence hung everywhere.

My strange companion had disappeared. I felt as though it were all a nightmare. Nothing seemed real. Everything was fantastic, terrorizing. "Nora!" I cried. "Oh, Nora!" And I started running toward the house. Then I stopped. I had called Nora, hadn't I? I didn't know why I should call her. She didn't love me. But I *had* called her!

My friend, you must now try to use your imagination. Pretend that you are speaking, but that you don't hear yourself. Try to imagine me, shouting, feeling my vocal cords function, but hearing no sound at all. Was I suddenly stone deaf? That's what I thought. I couldn't even hear my feet scrape on the ground. It was as though all the air had been taken away and no sound could travel.

(We turn here for Maple Grove, don't we? Yes. As I thought. Ah, the trees are so fresh out this way, the leaves so soft in the moonlight, aren't they? And the fragrance that the flowers gave off in the sun still lingers. I love the country, especially at night in the summer, when the air is mild, the moon clear, as it is now. What's that? Over there? Yes, I see what you mean—a sort of mist arising around the hill).

Well, to continue my story. I was thus frantic with fear, seemingly deaf, when a clear voice called my name. It was the stranger again. Unaccountable! I could hear *his* voice!

"Come this way," he said. His voice came from a grove of saplings at the side of the road.

"Where are you?" I asked. "And what is the meaning of this?" But still I couldn't hear my voice, nor the tread of my feet.

But he must have heard me, for he said: "This way. Don't be afraid."

It was dark, however, among the slender trees, and no assurance from him could dispel my fear. He was standing in an open space. I couldn't see him clearly, because the light was so wan.

"Sit down," he said. "I want to talk to you."

I looked behind me, put my hand out.

"Yes, that's a stump. Sit on it. It's a little wet, but it won't matter.

Then he began. "The moon, you may have heard, has some strange powers upon the affairs of man. Perhaps you've heard about them but haven't believed. Or perhaps you have heard only about some of them—the evil powers. It makes a difference who evokes those powers. The moon can help people, too. It can help you now, help you to forget Nora, if you will do as I say. The first thing is to let your whole body bathe in its light. You must take off your clothes."

It was strange. I had no desire to follow his suggestion, but it may as well have been a command, for I found myself unbuttoning my jacket, unlacing my shoes.

I stood there, then, bare in the moon-

light. The light seemed to fall in a spray through the mists, and I imagined that the mists did something to it. Changed it, somehow. It didn't seem like ordinary moonlight. It had a quality that was almost liquid.

(Wait. We turn here, my friend. This is the gate to Maple Grove. Let me go first. And be careful you don't step on the graves).

Well, this stranger to me—just as I am to you—began to mumble queer words. It sounded almost as though he were praying. He took off, then, his robe, and put it on me. This is it. I am still wearing it. But the odd thing was that I never saw him again. He disappeared as soon as he took the robe from his shoulders.

A sudden drowsiness came over me. I must have fallen to the ground and slept. At any rate, when I awoke— (Wait, my friend. Here is where we will stand—here in this open space away from the graves). When I awoke it was still moonlight, but now the moon was bright and clear. But things didn't seem the same. The stump I had sat on was no longer there. And the saplings—there were no saplings! Only a few tall trees. I got up, looked around. A few feet away was a small squared off area. There were leaning, neglected headstones in it. The inscriptions were worn but I could read them—"Ellsworth Grant," "Mary Grant," and finally, "Nora Grant." Then I read the dates—and was mystified.

At last I wandered off, scratching my head, wondering what it was all about.

Well, my friend, that was a hundred years ago. Some day you will find one who is suffering just as you and I have. You'll know when you see him. You will read his thoughts easily. In the meantime live long and well. You have had your true love. You can never have it again.

Yes, the mists have come. That's right, my friend, unbutton your garments. Don't be alarmed that you can hear nothing but my voice. Your body will slip into another time—and mine, just as his, to another world. You won't miss her so much, my friend, when you see her grave, and know it was a century ago she lived—and died!

FANTASY TO THRILL THE IMAGINATION!

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The Dog That Came Back

BY STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Did you ever hear tell of a canine ghost? And why not. . . .

"SOMETIMES we called him Cerberus, and sometimes simply Flash," related Sanderson, as he poked a log into the campfire and watched the blazes leap up with grimacing, weird red lips. "But most of the time we knew him only as the Dog that Came Back."

"Dog that Came Back?" I echoed; while the six of us, shivering deliciously, prepared for a good old yarn of the sort for which Sanderson was famous. "Mean to say he was dead—and came back as a canine ghost?"

"Ghost—nothing!" flung out Sanderson, spitting disgustedly into the flames. The shrewd old eyes, in the weatherworn face, had taken on a far-away glitter. "No, boys, this was a whale of a lot stranger than any ghost. Did it ever occur to you that maybe under certain circumstances a dead man—or dead dog, either—might come back if he had a purpose to carry out?"

We all sat watching the sparks streaming upward uncannily.

"It goes back more than twenty years,"

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

Sanderson went on, after taking out a pipe and starting to puff away contentedly. "Back near Ash Hollow, where I was brought up, there was a farm everybody knew as the Porcupine's Back—on account of a scrubby growth on the hills just behind it, reminding us all of a porcupine. It wasn't a bad sort of farm, but stood kind of isolated among the pine woods at a turn of the road, with the big, ancient farmhouse standing a ways back, squat and square as a fortress. But somehow or other nobody ever had much luck there—not, at least, since old Peter Hardacre disappeared back in the early twenties.

"Who was Peter Hardacre?" I put the natural question.

"Just about the queerest duffer this side of Halifax. He'd owned the farm for years, but kept to himself like the Grand Shah of Tibet; we used to see him going on long strolls, never accompanied by anybody but his Australian sheep dog—a splendid, blue-white creature that you couldn't get close to, as Hardacre had taught it to be surly. He himself was a leaning stick of a man, with eyes like hot, burning coals and a voice that never seemed more than one degree away from a growl. Nobody liked him, and I can tell you we gave him a wide berth. Just the same, he was said to have done well with the farm, and it was rumored he had a rich wad buried somewhere in that farmhouse of his."

SANDERSON paused to knock the ashes out of his pipe, then slowly went on, "If he'd been friends with any of the neighbors, chances are they'd of found out sooner about his disappearance. As it was, it was days, maybe weeks, before they got wind of it. And by that time the evidences of the crime had been buried."

"Evidences of what crime?"

"Just hold your horses, Harry—I'll be getting to that. As I was saying, it might have been weeks before we found out. Then somebody had to see Hardacre on some business matter—and darned if the fellow was not plumb gone. That wasn't all of it, though. There wasn't a trace of his dog, either."

"Well, what's strange about that?" someone demanded. "Chances are he just lit out, taking the dog with him."

"No way of getting out of Ash Hollow without being seen. Couldn't of bought a rail or bus ticket without the agent knowing and that jerky old tin Lizzie of his—well, we found her in the shed behind the house, her tanks full of gas."

"Then he must have wandered off into the woods and met some accident."

"But if so, why didn't the dog come back? He was a powerful, intelligent creature. Didn't seem at all likely they'd both had an accident."

A WEIGHTED silence followed while we all stared into the shadows behind the campfire, which suddenly seemed packed with unseen presences.

"Well, it was a seven days' wonder in the village," Sanderson resumed. "There was the usual sort of perfunctory investigation, including a search of the woods with bloodhounds, and then nobody giving a damn about old Hardacre, we all shrugged our shoulders and forgot the matter. A few years later his nephew John turned up from out west and got the court to declare Hardacre legally dead. So John took over the farm—but it wasn't more than three months before he left in a hurry, and sold at a bargain price. In the next dozen years the place must have had twenty owners; it was the talk of the town the way nobody could hold on. Then, a number of years ago, I myself was damn fool enough to buy the farm."

We all sat up in alert interest . . . chilly in spite of the blaze.

"Yes, I was damn fool enough to buy it," repeated Sanderson, smiling grimly. "Not that I really wanted it—did it more than half because one of the boys bet me I wouldn't dare to. Besides, the price was dirt cheap, and I'd just sold my old farm and was looking for somewhere to settle. The Porcupine's Back had possibilities, I saw—if only somebody handled it the right way."

"So you handled it the right way?" I asked, slyly.

Sanderson had arisen, and went storming back and forth; his hands, clasped behind him, wrenched at one another spasmodically.

"No, by God, I didn't!"

His manner was that of one re-living a

dreadful experience, as he meditatively continued.

"From the moment I moved in, I knew I was in the wrong pew. There was something about the house—well, I won't exactly say it made my hair stand on end, but made me feel creepy all the way through. Flash felt it also. He was my three-year-old Australian sheep dog—the breed being rather popular in our part of the country. He was a striking creature—large and strong, with eyes that had an almost human flash—which gave him his name. I'll admit, though, the eyes did have a peculiar look, the left one being surrounded by a patch of bluish-gray fur, while the right one was ringed about by pure white. It made him impossible to forget.

"But to return to the Porcupine's Back. Flash seemed oddly excited the moment our car stopped at the place; ran all around sniffing; then lifted his head, and let out a long-drawn howl. This rather startled us, as it was the first time we'd ever heard him howl. The moment we opened the house he dashed in and rushed to a storeroom in the rear. It was a small room, with a cement floor—to keep out the dampness, we thought; and the moment he got there, he set up the most piteous wailing and whining you ever heard, then ran to a spot in the corner near the window, and began sniffing, and scratching excitedly, as a dog will do when he smells a gopher. Nothing we said could stop him, even though he couldn't make any headway against the cement. But the strangest part of it all was the way his fur bristled and his wailings and whinings gave place to growls—I swear it, boys, they were ferocious enough to raise your hair. This surprised us all the more as Flash rarely growled.

"WELL, from then on we did have a time of it! We had to bar Flash from that room—he'd make the same infernal commotion whenever he got near it. His hair would bristle a lot now, and he'd walk about in a queer, suspicious way, as if he was waiting for someone. Also, a certain odd habit he'd had all his life was becoming more marked. Now Flash wasn't by any means a coward; he'd challenge a dog twice his size, and once routed a pair of burglars all by himself; but ever since he was bigger than my foot he was scared of the sound of a shot. Louder noises—airplanes, and locomotives rumbling past—wouldn't jar him in the least; but let so much as a cap pistol go off, and he'd tremble all over, his fur would stand up stiff and erect, his tail would go down between his legs, his eyes would take on a wild, strange look, and he'd run cowering into the nearest hiding-place."

"Now, now," I remonstrated, as Sanderson poked absently at the fire, with a faraway expression in his face. "I don't call that so unusual. Chances are he was scared by a gun when he was a pup—"

"Couldn't be!" snapped Sanderson. "He was one of our own litter—never was within range of gunshot. No, it was just as if he'd known about guns before. We simply couldn't cure him of the habit. What was more, his whining and growling about that storeroom door kept getting worse and worse—began to get on my nerves, and the Missus' too, so that one day she says to me, 'Dad, I've been thinking about Flash, and it's come to me lots of times, there's something hidden under that floor, and he knows it. What you say we dig it up and have a look?'

"I'm afraid I only growled at that—digging up a cement floor isn't any fun, particularly when you're chuck full of other chores. But one night after I'd been away a few hours, I came back to find the Missus and kids looking all pale and drawn. They said some shivery things had been happening—like the sound of invisible feet passing and a cold wind blowing by, and Flash had jumped up wagging his tail in joy; and right after that had set up the most horrible howling, which nobody could stop for hours.

"So then I decided to get out my pickaxe and have a try at that floor. 'Better make it at that corner near the window, where Flash did all his scratching,' the Missus advised. You ought've seen the look in Flash's eyes then—such excitement, and joy, too, as if he wanted to speak out, 'Boy, now you're on the right track!' "

"Well, were you on the right track?" Jim Macdonald asked, from the further end of the fire.

Sanderson sat puffing vigorously at his

pipe. The wail of some wild thing in the woods sent a quiver of eerie, primeval fear shuddering through me.

"At first," he resumed, "I thought I was just another damned fool. Late into the night I worked by the light of a kerosene lamp, the room not being wired for electricity, and all that I turned up was a lot of rocks and earth. It looked like just about the silliest thing any grown-up man ever put his hand to, and believe me I cursed myself no end. Still, there was something inside me that kept pushing me on. But after a while, when I'd dug a hole three or four feet deep and made a mess of the whole darned place, I was about tuckered out and swore I'd quit.

"I had just put down my tools when Flash burst into the room. I'd told the kids to keep him tied up outside while I worked, but it took a pretty good rope to hold Flash down—he'd bitten right through this one. So straight into the room he dashed, and plump right down into the hole. And then, boys! Did he start doing some digging of his own! His front paws began working like twin machines, and those pellets flew around the room until we thought we were bombarded. Nothing we did could stop him, and it wasn't three minutes before he came upon the first bit of evidence. Lord! I'll never forget the moment."

"What was it?" several voices asked, breathlessly.

"WELL, nothing but a badly tarnished old cigarette case, on which you could still make out the initials Q. E. V. Then, as I started turning it over in my hands, thinking how strange it was that a cigarette case should be so far underground, the Missus gave a cry and began pointing, and all at once went so pale I thought she was going to faint. Yes, by thunder, boys, you've guessed it! Sticking out of the ground, while Flash kept digging more furiously than ever, there was the end of a bone."

"Human bone?" I asked.

"No, skull of an animal—a large one, too. The base had been shattered—bullet hole was clearly visible. Just beside it we found the rest of the skeleton—a creature just about Flash's size, with the remains of a dog collar round the neck. And beneath it—well, just beneath it we made the real find."

The wind, screeching uncannily through the treetops, punctuated the speaker's brief halt.

"Of course," he resumed, slowly, "we hadn't much trouble guessing the identity of the second skeleton. It was that of a tall, narrow-chested man; and his skull also was pierced by a bullet hole. The police lost no time checking up on the dentition—the fillings and bridge work corresponded exactly with what old Doc Henderson had put in for Peter Hardacre years before—the Doc still had his yellowed record to prove it. So there was one mystery ended. But if Hardacre had met with foul play—as was only too blazing evident—who in the name of thunder was responsible? Well, there wasn't a shred of evidence—nothing, that is, except that tarnished old cigarette case."

"Should have thought," I volunteered, "the letters Q. E. V. would have been clue enough."

"Well, they were, in a way. Only one in these parts who had those initials was Quentin E. Vaile, a mason and stonecutter over to Briar's Lane. He was a hard, coarse fellow, cruel as a Trojan when he wasn't drunk—and crueler than a corps of Trojans when he was drunk, which was most of the time. Nobody was ever fond of old Vaile—still, we hadn't thought of connecting him with any crime. It was true, we did remember something about his coming into sudden wealth twenty years or so before, about the time of Hardacre's disappearance; but he had had a story about some aunt of his dying and leaving him a wad; and nobody thought much about it, particularly as it wasn't long before he had drunk himself out of the money. But now all at once, when it was known he'd been arrested, the whole town buzzed with rumors."

"Just the same," agrued Macdonald, "you couldn't fasten the crime on him without more evidence. There might be other explanations about that cigarette case."

"THAT'S just what he claimed. Said he had passed it over to Hardacre as surety for a loan. Of course, nobody believed him, Hardacre not being the kind to make a loan to his own mother—still, there

wasn't any way in law of disproving it. Looked as if the black devil was going scot-free—and would have, too, if it hadn't been for Flash."

"Not that anybody gave a thought to Flash. But those local sleuths had got an idea—they'd heard the old yarn about how a criminal is sometimes startled into a confession when he's shown the scene of his crime. Anyway, this was the only thing they had to go on; and they knew darn well that if it didn't work, why then they were at the end of their rope.

"If I live to be a hundred, I'll never forget that day when they brought him to the Porcupine's Back. I hadn't been expecting them just then—had been weeding a patch of potatoes at one side of the house, with Flash sleeping in the sun a little ways off. Suddenly he leapt up, the way an animal will do when he scents an enemy. His fur bristled. His lips opened in a snarl, revealing the white glistening teeth. Savage growls came from his throat. His eyes gleamed with a fierceness that reminded me of a wolf's. Then he made a frenzied dash forward, and it was only now that I noticed the car winding down the driveway toward the house.

"As a general thing, Flash was a good enough watchdog, and would give a perfunctory bark or two whenever a stranger approached. But this time there was nothing perfuntory in his barking. I'd never heard such a ferocious outburst from him before.

"What happened next was hidden from my eyes by a clump of bushes, but I heard yells mixed with the barking; and started at a sprint toward the source of the commotion. I got there just in time to see two policemen holding Flash—it took all they had to keep him back, too—while he growled in a way to beat the devil, and made a series of terrible lunges toward Vaile, who was held by two other officers. God! if the men had lost their grip on that dog, it wouldn't have been a second before he'd ripped Vaile's throat out."

"Had he ever seen Vaile before?" I asked. "Maybe the fellow had scared or hurt him sometime or other."

"No, Vaile living over to Briar's Lane, a good ten miles off, it was morally certain they'd never met. Besides, you ought've seen Vaile's expression. It wasn't that of an ordinary man threatened by a dog. The mean, wizened features were convulsed—yes, I'd take my oath, convulsed like those of a man who's seen a ghost. His whole face had turned white. He trembled as if with the palsy. One lean hand shot out, and he exclaimed, as if under some uncontrollable drive, 'That's him—Lord, that's him! My God, I'd know him anywhere, with that one blue eye and one white! He's come back, come back—come back to get me!' It was then that, for the first time, I remembered having been told that Hardacre's dog had had one eye ringed with a patch of bluish fur, and one with white, just like Flash.

"I think all of us realized that something important was on the way, because we let Vaile rave on, while Flash kept up that wild growling and snarling and never for one second quit tugging to get at the man.

" 'Yes, that's him, I'm cursed if it ain't!' Vailed rushed on, and I really think he was as a man cursed and didn't know what he was saying. 'Keep him off, my God, keep him off! . . . That's him—I've seen him in my nightmares — always knew he'd come back to get me! I've seen those burning, flashing eyes—yes, those same devil's eyes, glaring at me like they wanted to eat me up —and by hell, I knew they would sometime, too!'

"VAILE staggered, pretty near collapse, and had to be helped back into the car. And then, all shaken and unnerved, he didn't lose much time about coming out with his confession. 'Might as well tell you, damn it!' he sputtered. 'Yes, might as well tell you. The thing's haunted me all these years—I've been on the point a hundred times. Yes, I was the hell-blasted idiot that killed Hardacre—and the dog, too!'

"After a time, he went on, 'Didn't mean to murder 'em—swear to God, I didn't. Just came for old Hardacre's cash—knew he had a pile hidden somewhere, and I was dead broke. Took a pistol along, just to encourage him—but I'll be blasted if he didn't jump me before I could snap it out. In the scuffle I shot him through the head; and just as I was rising to my feet afterwards, damned if I didn't see a living thunderbolt come flying through the air straight at me.

There wasn't any time to think—I knew it was the dog's life or mine. As he fell, shot in the head, with the most pitiful moaning you ever heard, I seemed to see a look in his eyes that said—yes, I'll be damned forever if he didn't say he was coming back to get me!' "

"But what about the bodies?" asked Macdonald. "How did they come to be there under that cement floor?"

"Oh, that was simple. Vaile knew all about cement work in his trade, of course; and thought the best way to hide the evidence was to put it under a cement floor, where nobody in the world would ever think of looking. The farm being isolated and hardly anyone ever stepping in, he had time enough to carry out his plans. As he worked, his cigarette case must have dropped from his pocket without his noticing it."

FOR several minutes we all sat staring in silence into the fire.

"I guess you'll think I'm crazy," Sanderson went on, but I couldn't help wondering if maybe Vaile wasn't right. Maybe Flash really was Hardacre's dog come back—reborn so as to catch the murderer. Wouldn't that explain why he was always so scared of a shot?—and why he acted as he did when he got to the farm, and started right off to dig in the old storeroom? Most of all, wouldn't it show why he wanted to kill Vaile the minute he sensed his presence—and, more than that, why Vaile was so terrified of him?

"Well, in any case"—Sanderson's voice grew lower and more confidential—"Flash had a look which seemed to tell me he understood all. The day they sentenced Vaile to the penitentiary, there was such a light in his eyes—I'll swear he knew what had happened. After that, he didn't go about the house whining or growling any more; though he did often stop right in the middle of a room, with the plainest evidences of delight you ever saw, and leap up to lick a hand when nobody at all was there. And then I knew he wasn't really my dog at all. He belonged to someone else—someone who had gone. And that was why we called him the Dog that Came Back."

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The Breeze and I

WON'T you help me? *Please* help me . . .

I stumbled into this thing so innocently, and now . . . now there have been so many killed or injured, so much property destroyed, so many lives wrecked! Last night I walked and walked through the dark streets of my home town, trying to think of a way out, a way I can stop . . . *stop* . . .

But how can I? The danger is here, here in my head, firmly embedded in my memory; and there is no way to get it out, is there? I've thought . . . surgery. If that portion of my brain could . . . could be removed, the part that remembers, the part that records and pigeonholes every little insignificant thing we have ever learned from earliest childhood. Isn't there an operation, called lobotomy, in which the surgeon can separate the conscious part of our working mind from the subconscious. . . . I would submit to that, Oh, *anything* . . . ! I've even thought of suicide.

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

BY MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

Because I must forget *the Word*. I must. *I must!* Oh, it frightens me to think how easily the human mind can make toys of ancient laws of physics . . .! I didn't know, I just didn't realize. You *must* believe that I was no more to blame than a child with a loaded gun some careless adult left within its reach. . . .

Believe me when I tell you I have never been more than casually interested in diabolism and the supernatural. I simply didn't believe in it, all that hocuspocus about incantations and contiguous magic. Oh, I suppose I knock on wood and avoid walking under ladders about as often as the next one. But you really can't pound a typewriter in a corporation lawyer's office, day in, day out, reducing everything in life to a dry legal phrase, and still go on believing in witches and warlocks. I didn't, before that morning on the hill. I don't now . . .

I simply know now that ancient magic and modern science are one and the same, and that our so-called learned inventors have barely stumbled upon an inkling of what the ancient Magi, the old Persian *mobeds*, the lost Mayan and Aztec priests knew as we know how to add and subtract. Control of the elements was as

Incantations, magic, witches and warlocks—you *call it silly hocuspocus, yet. . . .*

simple to them as telephoning or turning on a hydrant is to us.

But that hot still summer afternoon I decided to go for a hike, I didn't know any of this. I went to my stuffy little room straight from the office, got into a pair of Oxfords, a skirt and sweater, and tied a scarf carefully around my wave because I had a dinner date that night with one of the clerks in the office. I would take a bus across town and hike up the mountainside, I decided. We had been up there a few months before, on an office-personnel picnic, and I had been wanting to go back alone.

IT WAS a beautiful afternoon, hot and still as I said, with white cumulus clouds piled up along the horizon. When I reached the spot I had chosen to sit and read alone, write some letters and so on, I was dripping with perspiration from my climb. The great pile of rocks felt oven-hot to my touch as I paused to look down at a toy-town spread out, quilt-like, far below. The needles of the pines that towered over my chosen retreat hung limp and unstirring in the heat. I sat down on a lower rock for a moment to catch my breath, then climbed to a higher perch where I could command a view of the whole valley.

Tiring of the view presently, I wrote a few notes that were overdue, then pulled out a small book I had come across in the library. It was a not too popular volume about the speaking voice, its power to charm or repel the listener. There were some exercises, purported to teach one a more musical command of the English language. Laughing aloud at myself, I chanted the syllables prescribed: *ba, be, bi. bo, boo,* glad that no one could hear me babbling such nonsense. The sound of my voice startled me in the quiet and solitude of the place, the last sound seeming to hang in the air like smoke.

Amused, I riffled through the book, nibbling here and there, then flipped back the pages to the flyleaf where someone had been scribbling notes in a cramped old-fashioned hand. There were footnotes referring to several tone-exercises in the book, and down in one corner a curious word that looked like Hebrew. Under it, obviously an English translation of the word-sound, were written a string of seven syllables, hyphenated each from each. They were such odd-looking syllables, combined with consonants like *szf*—and *tkw*—that I amused myself at once by trying to pronounce them.

"Pfthulkth," was one of them. (My God, if I could only forget it!) *"Agdroomh,"* was another. (No power on earth could make me repeat all seven to you, in order). Some were unutterably tongue-twisting, harsh, obscene. Others were soft, crooning, mellifluous. Still others, two of them, had a quick staccato sound, typical of Polynesians words. Taken all together, I have never heard a more unlikely collection of sounds in any language. I decided that the queer word scrawled above the syllables could not be Hebraic, but must be some other more ancient language, perhaps even Sanskrit. There were a few wedged-shaped figures that might have been the cuneiform of early Assyrian or Babylonian inscriptions I had once seen in a museum. There were a number of zigzags and spirals, and even a few figures that looked like Egyptian picture-writing.

The sound of it intrigued me, as a child often becomes fascinated by a new word it hears. Childlike, I sat there on that lonely rock, twisting the syllables around and around on my tongue, accenting first one, then another of them. Once I chuckled at myself, wondering whether my date for the evening would still want to take me out to dinner if he could overhear my soft insane mutterings: *"Pfthulkth-agdroomh . . ."* and the rest of it, which I must not, for your sanity's sake, repeat to you in full.

FINALLY I got to a point where I could say the whole thing rather fluently, all seven distinct sounds, wondering what—in that elder-world language—it could have meant. Perhaps it was a name, perhaps only a sort of cry. To this day I do not know.

All at once it struck my fancy to pronounce it a different way, using long vowel sounds where I had formerly used short ones. Looking down at the written word, I tried this several times, whispering aloud to myself. . . .

What occurred happened without warning. One moment I was sitting, wilted by the summer heat, on top of my rock perch, book in hand. The next moment I was clinging to my perch for dear life, skirt blowing up over my head, scarf ripped off and blown, along with my book, several yards down the mountainside. Leaves and dust spiraled about me in a funnel-shaped cloud, of which I was the center.

A dry incredibly cold wind was howling about me, materialized out of nowhere. Except for a space of perhaps ten feet about me, not a leaf, not a twig was stirring. Only one tree, a leafy little sapling that had sprouted from my rock, was bending at all —and it was whipping about as though lashed by a midwinter gale.

FOR about five minutes this weird breeze eddied and whistled about me. Then, slowly, it died away. I mean it *died,* stopped dead, did not drift on, tossing other trees in passing as is the way with an ordinary wind. It came out of nowhere, and simply went back there, like a candle that is snuffed out.

I sat there for a moment, shivering from the icy blast of it, now grateful for the warm sun. As the wind did not come again, I climbed down from my little eyrie and went about retrieving my belongings. But, to my annoyance, I found that I could reach neither of them. The scarf had blown high into a tree and was dangling well out of my reach, even though I fished for it with a long stick. The speech book I could not find; that freak wind had tumbled it into some dense clump of undergrowth. The thought of snakes kept me from searching for it further. I would simply have to pay the library for its loss and forget it, I decided, climbing back down the mountain trail in a mood of sharp annoyance. I patted at my hair, also aware that there was not much left of my neat wave, after the tossing that whirlwind had given it.

Standing on the corner waiting for my crosstown bus, I regretted my "back-to-nature" impulse. The bus was late, my dinner would be late, and my escort was a rather prissy young man who made a fetish of punctuality. Suddenly, thinking of him, my mood did an about-face, and I began to wish I had scrapped the dinner date in favor of a longer stay on my quiet hillside. Modern city-dwellers, I mused, are too far removed from nature, too easily upset by the discomforts of inclement weather. My thoughts went back to the high rock. What did a silly scarf and a second-hand book matter, after all? It had been rather fun, sitting up there alone, like a visitor to some deserted alien planet, tossed and buffeted by that odd wind that had blown up so unexpectedly.

My thoughts veered again, pleasantly, to that queer word I had seen on the flyleaf of the book. Could I remember those queer syllables? I shut my eyes, groping for them in the shallow recesses of my recent memory. *Pfthul.* . . . No, *pfthulkth-agdroomh* . . . I recalled them haltingly, and was murmuring the final syllable as my bus rumbled up. I ran to meet it, but ahead of me appeared a militant fat woman with an armful of packages. The bus was crowded, and the bus-driver held up one finger as we converged on the open door. Standing room, for one. . . .

The fat woman took one look at me, smiled rather maliciously at my size and weight, and quite simply bumped me out of range in order to enter the bus in my place.

But she took only the first step.

THAT slight jar caused me to grunt aloud, and my lips had absently been forming the last syllable of that strange word in the speech book. As it jolted from me, a roaring swelled abruptly in my ears. Out of the warm still air there rose a swift gust of wind—dry, cold, and full of eerie sounds. It struck the bus broadside with such force that several of the passengers were knocked from their seats. One man's evening paper flew from his hands and plastered itself across the face of another man, seated across the aisle. A third man's hat blew off. And, as for my rude friend with the packages!

In a space of two minutes she was sitting in the gutter several feet away from the bus door, one shoe off, her bundles scattered all over the sidewalk, a paper crate of eggs smashed and dripping in her ample lap. She looked so outraged, after her elbowing ex-

hibition a moment before, that everyone on the bus started laughing at her. The bus driver himself grinned and beckoned me aboard. But I really could not help feeling sorry for my worsted adversary.

Instead, I walked over and helped her to her feet, rounded up her parcels, salvaged the few eggs that were not broken, and ushered her into the bus. She went, looking chastened as I waved goodbye from the curb, grinning. My good humor had returned, and remained with me even while I waited for the next bus.

I would have to tell my date tonight about the fat lady, and about my own wind-tossing on the hilltop. Today was certainly a day for freak gusts, I mused. Most unusual for midsummer, too . . . I shifted my stance on the curb and let my mind wander again idly. The queer word in the speech book recurred to me, and I began—in the way of people waiting for a bus—to mumble it to myself again, as one might hum a catchy new tune. I believe I made a little "scat-song" of it, and suddenly found myself repeating it in rhythm. . . . You know the habit. Some silly combination of sounds in a popular song-lyric often catches the public fancy, and you'll hear it everywhere. ". . . *vo-do-deo-do* . . ." dates one generation; "*jada-jada-jing-jing-jing* . . ." another; ". . . . *hutsut-ralson-on-the-rillarah*" still another. The jibberish at present in favor, I believe, is "*hey baba-leba.*"

Without thought on the subject, this public "aberration" may strike you as merely a childish fad. I assure you, it is not. Sounds and cadence have a profound effect on the human spirit, for good or for evil. All poetry, all music, must surely be based on this principal. And it is not a matter of idle fancy. Believe me, I know that now; I'm sure of it. Perhaps I've stumbled on some irrevocable law of *affinity*, of atomic vibration, well-known and understood by the ancients but yet to be "discovered" by our modern science. . . .

For, as I stood there on the corner waiting for my bus, chanting that strange *Word* in idle cadence, I became aware of something with a shock of realization. Little puffs of wind were dancing about me . . . out of a windless sky! For an area not twelve feet around me, quick gusts were puffing *inward* at me, tugging my skirt playfully. Like some unseen hand wielding a bellows, a tiny breeze swished about me, died, swished again, died . . . *in perfect time to my rhythmic chanting of that word scrawled in the speech book!*

I broke off, mouth open with astonishment and disbelief. Was it only a coincidence? That experience on the hilltop. And then, the business of the fat woman. . . . My scalp began to prickle, and I swallowed on a dry throat. Then, steeling myself, I whispered the *word* again, very softly. . . .

As though I had pressed a button, a gentle wind rose about me, eddied and swirled briefly, then died down like a pet dog curling up at my feet!

I began to tremble. This was insanity, of course! Once in an old book on witchcraft, I had seen a silly incantation by which the warlock was supposedly able to "raise the wind." I recalled it now, with the kind of detached amusement that designers of a B-19 must feel at sight of those early Wright Brother planes. The old Scottish words came back to me:

"I knok thyss ragge upone thyss stane
To raise ye Wyndde in ye Devellys Name.
It sall not lye till I speak agane. . . ."

How often had the old masters of sailing ships tried to "raise the wind" when their crafts were becalmed, I thought . . . but with childish rhymes, chanted in cadence, while they knocked a rag on a stone three times! But, I thought now with a chill of real terror, they had not been so far from the "scientific principal" of wind-raising as one might think!

They had simply not known the right *sounds* to use in order to cause that peculiar vibrating action of the atmosphere which, I saw with a creepy feeling, this ancient *Word* I had stumbled upon could do quite easily. Did it create a vacuum in the space just around where it was spoken aloud, an icy thinning of atmosphere, into which air must rush by an unchangeable law of nature? The louder it was spoken, the larger the vacuum, the stronger the wind. . . .?

I shut my eyes, clinging to the last shreds of sanity. What a silly fancy to be frightening a hard-headed young secretary to a

law firm on a commonplace street-corner, waiting for a large tangible bus! Now I could see it coming far down the block, and stepped out to meet it with a ridiculous feeling of running away from something dark, huge and frightful.

Seated next to a sleepy Italian who reeked of garlic, I was able to laugh at my fantasy. "Raising the wind" by speaking a *Word* into the air! I had indeed let a mood and a few coincidences carry me away beyond common sense.

Certainly it was possible for modern man to control the wind and the lightning, hold back the tide, send thoughts and even pictures through the air—things that sounded like "magic" to the Old World. But each of these feats required a great deal of equipment, I told myself, smiling —electric fans, dynamoes, radios and telephones. No one had ever been able to do any of these things *without* intricate machinery. . . . Or had they? I tensed, bracing myself against the possibility. There is a very simple scientific principal involved in each of these modern miracles. Could they be performed, by chance, using only the principal itself, without using the heavy complicated machinery by which science has harnessed each principal?

SHIVERING, I thrust these deeply bewildering ideas from my head, and dragged myself back to the reality of a quick shower and a rather dull dinner-engagement. It takes a peculiar kind of intrepid intelligence to explore the boundless Unknown with pleasure. Mine is of the ordinary kind that shies away from anything but the commonplace, the known, the understood. . . . Can you see how I felt about my weird discovery? I didn't really *believe* it, because I didn't want to believe it, I didn't even want to think such broad and terrifying thoughts. You comprehend? I preferred just to press the light switch button and leave the understanding of electricity to someone else! Did Aladdin worry about how the geni got into the lamp, or why?

Hurriedly I dressed for my date, thrusting the vague conjectures from my mind as my escort rang and entered the living room of my apartment. Peeking out at him, I thought again what a stuffy matter-of-fact young man he was, as dry and precise as a legal document. All at once I had an impish impulse to rumple that neat hair, to pull his tie crooked, to yank the horned-rimmed glasses from his owlish eyes. Suddenly I realized that I was tired and bored with my uninspired job at the law office, tired of this unromantic little "efficiency apartment," bored with this nice young man whom, eventually, I would marry and live with his mother and aunt in their large correct Victorian home across town.

I suppose every young woman in the world has experienced this mood of revolt, of petty defiance, at one time or another. Most of us quarrel with our fiancés, or fling ourselves into a new romance before settling down, or perhaps take a trip to Mexico or Bermuda. . . . Oh, it is never more than a whim, a perverse feminine mood that will pass. Only . . . only. . . . Please believe me, I never meant to go so far, to tamper with such a monstrous ungovernable force!

It was only the sight of Kenneth sitting there, upright on my flowered-chintz settee, glancing at his watch from time to time. . . .

I didn't mean any harm. I just couldn't resist it . . . putting my lips to the crack of my door, and whispering that *Word* into the room.

There was, as before, a whistling roaring sound. A blast of wind seemed to gush from the very walls, spiraling about that small room in a cyclone of blown papers, books, curtains and flowers snatched from a vase on the mantel. I thought of the phrase: *tempest in a teapot*, watching and laughing silently as Kenneth leaped up, looking about wildly for the source of such a draught. The windows and doors were closed, the furnace vent was closed. . . . Bent double with mirth, I decided that I had never seen a more flabbergasted young law clerk in my life, witnessing as he was the repeal of a natural law he had always taken for granted.

I chose that moment to emerge, looking with mock dismay at the shambles of my living room.

"Why, *Kenneth!* What on earth have you been *doing* in here?"

He gaped at me, blinking. "Why, I . . . I. . . . It was the wind! It blew everything

. . . all over the . . . Good Lord, you don't think *I* . . .?"

"Wind!" I snapped "How could the wind get in here, on a night like this, too! Really, Kenneth." I nodded at the window, closed in case it should rain while I was out. "There's not a breath stirring. . . . Are you crazy?"

"No! It does sound incredible, but I tell you . . ."

"Never mind, Kenneth, I said severely. "I suppose you were just looking for something. It shows me what sort of husband you'll make, tearing up a room that way every time you lose your temper! I bit my lips to keep from giggling, and swept out of the apartment with a babbling protesting young man in my wake.

AS WE climbed into my fiancé's coupe, I cast a sly look at him. He was still a bit dazed by the phenomena of that whirlwind in a closed room, and as we climbed from the car near our favorite cafe, I had the devilish impulse to upset his calm again. Very softly I whispered the ancient *Word* into the warm summer night, and instantly a small breeze curled about us, snatching off Kenneth's hat and sailing it into the street. He ran for it; I hissed the strange syllables once more, and the hat leaped away from under his hand. It curved, like a boomerang, and dropped at my feet. When Kenneth returned from his vain search under a parked car, I handed it to him with great dignity.

"*Really,* Kenneth!" I murmured testily. "You're acting very oddly tonight! Like a small boy on a rampage."

He looked at me, embarrassed. "It's . . . certainly windy, isn't it? I never saw such gusts in midsummer. . . ."

"Wind again!" I sniffed. "There's no wind. How could there be on a hot still night like this? . . . Maybe we'd better go back home. Don't you feel well?"

"I feel fine!" he snapped defiantly. Then, turning to buy a bunch of violets from an old street-vendor, he remarked loudly: "Windy tonight, isn't it?"

The old hag squinted at him, puzzled. "*Windy?* I wisht a breeze *would* blow up, it's that close and hot a body can't hardly breathe!"

I stifled a giggle as Kenneth looked at her, startled. On another impulse as we turned to enter the cafe, I whispered the *Word* back over my shoulder. A last covert glance showed me the old flower-seller wildly clutching her skirts and shawl, in a vortex of flying petals, nosegays and shorn leaves. My breeze was whirling about her in a mischievous little cloud, while sweltering breeze-less passersby looked on in astonishment at what, to them, could only have been some sort of epileptic fit.

Kenneth and I stood at the door in a small knot of patrons waiting for the headwaiter to find them a table. As that haughty individual approached, looking us over like so many cattle in a slaughterpen, my impulse of revolt struck again. How many times has everyone wanted to "get even" with a nasty headwaiter! This, I thought, eyes shining with a childish sort of mischief, was my golden opportunity!

I waited until he had almost reached us, looking down his nose and sidestepping a waiter bearing a tray of bouillon. Then I whispered sharply, distinctly, accenting the last syllable of that weird incantation with real malice.

The effect was all I could have desired. Waiter, tray, bouillon, and haughty headwaiter were instantly flung together and whirled merrily by a gust of wind. They clung together in consternation for a moment before the sudden breeze dropped away from them and pitched them, dripping with broth, to the cafe floor.

"*What'sabigidea?*" snarled the waiter, picking himself up and groping for his tray and bowls.

"*Idiot!*" grated the headwaiter. "Why don't you look where you're going?"

"Why don't *I*. . .?" The waiter towered above him for an instant, a muscular young giant who should have been a gym instructor. He seemed to weigh the consequences briefly, then made his decision, and punched the headwaiter soundly in the nose.

"Well, I must say! This place has become a regular *dive!*" I murmured demurely to Kenneth. "Can't we have dinner somewhere else?"

"Certainly, dear." My fiancé was contrite again, while I snickered in secret. "I wouldn't have brought you here, naturally,

if I'd thought we'd run into a public brawl! We'll go to *Cianelli's* across the street."

"Oh, fine," I caroled innocently. "I adore Italian food anyway!"

Already my impish imagination was leaping ahead, planning new pranks for this new-found *genii* of mine—the wind. Oh, power is a heady thing, isn't it? Especially a secret power like the one I had stumbled upon, up there on that lonely hilltop: the power to raise the wind and command it; to have an element, older than man, at my beck and call.

Wouldn't you have had the same impulse, in my place? Tell me, in all honesty—would you not have been tempted to *play* with such a Force, miraculously dropped into your lap by chance like a fascinating new mechanical-toy? I . . . I blame myself so bitterly for what has happened; and it frightens me so to think what yet may happen. . . .

WE HAD already dined and were coming out of *Cianelli's*—where I had led poor Kenneth a dog's life indeed with my practical jokes. A smear of spaghetti sauce was on his collar, where my breeze had abruptly wrapped a plateful of the long unwieldly stuff around his blushing neck. I had also caused another loud argument over a ten-dollar bill, wafted lightly from one table to another just as a patron was about to pay his check. Like a naughty child, I stood there on the street now, peeping at Kenneth and giggling at his mortified expression.

He looked so thoroughly unhappy that I half opened my mouth to tell him that fantastic truth, to see his utter disbelief and then wipe it from his prim dignified face with a demonstration of my accidental Magi-power. . . .

It was at this moment that the street-broadcast caught my eye: that popular feature of all smalltown radio stations. The announcer had plugged in his "roving microphone" near *Cianelli's* doorway, and was now busily snaring patrons as they came out, asking their names and addresses, and then putting to them one of those silly questions that are the backbone of such programs.

As we strolled by on our way to the car, the bald-headed announcer reached out expertly and caught Kenneth's arm.

". . . Ahh! Here's a lovely little couple, lovely, lovely. . . . Newlyweds? Hahaha! Not yet but soon, eh, folks? . . . What's your name, sir? Would you say a few words to our listening public?"

Kenneth grimaced at me, but gave his name politely, and told the radio audience, via 1210-kilocycles, that he and his fiancée had dined at *Cianelli's* (who was sponsoring the program that evening). He said we were now on our way to a movie. No, Kenneth said self-consciously, we were not going to see Van Johnson, we had already seen Van Johnson. There was a re-release at the *Galax* of "Gone With The Wind," Kenneth said, and we were going there. Aside, he murmured to me:

"Say something, dear. Mother and Aunt Margaret will be listening in."

Oh, such little, *little* things can light the fuse of disaster, can't they? A word, a right-turn at some street intersection, a cigarette stub tossed into dry grass. A foolish harmless little joke. . . .

The announcer was thanking Kenneth, and now turned, beaming, to me. "And the young lady's name? Your fiancée, is she? Now, isn't that sweet, folks! 'There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dreams!' " he drooled. "That's what the poet . . . uh . . . the *poet* said, yessiree! Isn't that right, Mis . . . er . . . Miss—?"

"Pfthulkth-agdroom. . . ." I said clearly, impishly, into the mike—pronouncing every dread syllable of that ancient *Word* I had happened upon, scrawled on the fly-leaf of a book by, perhaps, some erudite old professor of elocution who did not himself know its portent. When you stop and think about it, we are placing frightful powers in the hands of fools and babies every day of our modern life; putting our very lives at the mercy of those who may use such power as lightly, as irresponsibly as I did. Oh, believe me, I never, never meant harm to anyone. . . . I just didn't know, I didn't realize. . . .

Yes; I was like a child, a mischievous but well-meaning child, with a loaded gun shoved carelessly into its hands. And then, suddenly, that loaded gun became a hundred, a thousand. . . . *That dreadful Word;*

I had spoken it into a microphone! Do you understand? For an instant I didn't . . . and then, even before that awful roaring filled the sky, I saw the frightful consequences of my foolish little whim.

THOSE sounds, those eerie syllables—caught up, amplified, repeated by a thousand or more radios all over our quiet unsuspecting town. Bursting into hundreds of peaceful little rooms where people sat, cozily listening to that ordinary street-broadcast which they had heard so often on Wednesday nights over our local station. Only, on this night it would carry a deadly bombshell of medieval magic. . . . Just a *Word,* a series of peculiar sounds. . . . But wherever they were audible, congealing the atmosphere into a thousand empty icy little holes, warm air must rush—by an inevitable law of nature—to fill up those vacuums with a mighty sweeping howling intensity!

I had hardly ceased speaking when the roaring became audible. It rose from all sides, like a hundred freight trains thundering down upon us. I saw only a flash of terror on the announcer's face as he stared up at the sky, throwing up his arm to shield his face as a blown cloud of debris swept down the street. Wind struck us like a blunt fist. It flung me across the sidewalk against the wall of *Cianelli's;* pelted me with trash and splintered wood. The roaring grew in volume, grew and grew to a howling crescendo. Then the wall behind me gave way, and I went down, buried under a pile of bricks and crumbling mortar. . . . The last thing I remember was that poor announcer being picked up like a rag doll and dashed through the top of a car parked nearby. That, and Kenneth's voice calling me, screaming my name, clawing at the bricks that cascaded down upon us. Then he was sprawled on top of me, shielding me with his body.

"It's a tornado!" he was screaming. *"Lie flat, lie still, darling; you're safe right here!"*

Then something must have struck his head, for he slumped over me and . . . and . . .

"Rest?" *Rest,* you tell me! You too? You don't believe me! You say. . . .

But I *can't* rest! Please, let me talk; let me. . . . You've got to help me! Don't you understand? I've been lying here in this hospital bed for ten days, begging someone to listen, to believe me! They all think I'm delirious, that I have a concussion. . . . The doctor, the nurses are so kind! Everyone is so *kind,* because they don't believe me.

Kenneth doesn't believe me, either. He will come in here to see me again this afternoon, as he has come every day—to bring me flowers or magazines, to hold my hand so gently and tell me that I must rest. Just rest and try to forget about my terrible experience of the storm. . . . I'm all he has now, he said so tenderly, now that his mother is gone, and Aunt Margaret. And their pleasant old-fashioned house—the carpenters have already started work repairing the demolished wing where that big tree came crashing down. . . . When we come back from our honeymoon, Kenneth says, my nerves will be well again. We'll begin life all over, and I'll lose this pitiful obsession of mine, that I'm responsible for his mother's death, for his aunt's, for so many others! . . . Oh, yes, Kenneth says in that sweet tender tone that is like acid to my guilty spirit; my condition of shock will pass and I'll see that his not being at home with his family the night of the tornado, instead of with me, could not have saved them, as I seem to feel. . . . He thinks that's what I mean when I keep saying it's all my fault!

Do you see? It's like talking to a stone wall. Nobody will believe me: that it was I —*I!*—who was the cause of that hideous storm! That now I have no right to happiness, to the love of a husband like Kenneth. That I'm a . . . a sort of careless brutal monster, bringing down destruction and death on thousands of innocent people by toying with a *Force* they don't even know exists. I raised the wind "in the Devellys Name," like the sorcerers of old, and unleashed it on those about me with no thought but for my own idle, caprice. In another century they would have burned me at the stake, as I deserve! Oh, to me that would be mercy! What I can't bear is the tender loving look in Kenneth's eyes, the soothing voice of the doctor when I beg him not to give me a sleeping potion. . . . *Not to let me sleep!* Don't you see, I don't *dare* sleep! What if I murmur that terrible *Word* out

loud again, with all these sick and maimed people lying helpless around me in this hospital ward?

They . . . they don't know, they don't dream what I did to them. *Or what I might do again, any moment, night or day. . . !*

Won't you make them bind my mouth with a gag, as I've begged them to, again and again? Won't you explain to the doctor that he must, *must* give me something, do something to blot that evil *Word* from my memory? I . . . I'm like a live bomb to all these people, and they don't even suspect! Oh, please help me! Those dread syllables keep burning into my thoughts until I . . . I'm terrified that I'll scream it aloud, over and over and over. . . . Louder! *Louder!* Until a dry cold wind goes roaring across the whole face of the earth, sweeping everything before it! *Pfthulkth! . . . Pfthulkath—agdroomb-sssissikikiti-gronbild. . . .*

You see? Hear it? The wind is rising! *The wind is rising! . . . .*

Resurrection

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

SORCERESS and sorcerer,
Risen from the sepulcher,
From the deep, unhallowed ground,
We have found and we have bound
Each the other, as before,
With the fatal spells of yore—
With Sabbatic sign, and word
That Thessalian moons have heard.

Sorcerer and sorceress,
Hold we still our heathenness—
Loving without sin or shame—
As in years of stake and flame;
Share we now the witches' madness,
Wake the Hecatean gladness,
Call the demon named Delight
From his lair of burning night.

Love that was, and love to be,
Dwell within this wizardry:
Lay your arm my head beneath
As upon some nighted heath
Where we slumbered all alone
When the Sabbat's rout was flown;
Let me drink your dulcet breath
As in evenings after death.

Witch beloved from of old,
When upon Atlantis rolled
All the dire and wrathful deep,
You had kissed mine eyes asleep;
On my lids shall fall your lips
In the final sun's eclipse;
And your hand shall take my hand
In the last and utmost land.

The Digging at Pistol Key

BY CARL JACOBI

ALTHOUGH he had lived in Trinidad for more than fifteen years, Jason Cunard might as well have remained in Devonshire, his original home, for all the local background he had absorbed. He read only British newspapers, the *Times* and the *Daily Mail*, which he received by weekly post, and he even had his tea sent

When you want to hide something you bury it—its supposed to be there when you go digging it up!

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

him from a shop in Southhampton, unmindful of the fact that he could have obtained the same brand, minus the heavy tax, at the local importer in Port-of-Spain.

Of course, Cunard got into town only once a month, and then his time was pretty well occupied with business matters concerning his sugar plantation. He had a house on a rather barren promontory midway between Port-of-Spain and San Fernando which was known as Pistol Key. But his plantation sprawled over a large tract in the center of the island.

Cunard frankly admitted there was nothing about Trinidad he liked. He thought the climate insufferable, the people—the Britishers, that is—provincial, and the rest of the population, a polyglot of races that could be grouped collectively as "natives and foreigners." He dreamed constantly of Devonshire, though he knew of course he would never go back.

Whether it was due to this brooding or his savage temper, the fact remained that he had the greatest difficulty in keeping house-servants. Since his wife had died two years ago, he had had no less than seven; Caribs, quadroons, and Creoles of one sort or another. His latest, a lean, gangly black boy, went by the name of Christopher, and was undoubtedly the worst of the lot.

As Cunard entered the house now, he was in a distinctly bad frame of mind. Coming down the coast highway, he had had the misfortune to have a flat tire and had damaged his clothes considerably in changing it. He rang the antiquated bell-pull savagely.

Presently Christopher shambled through the connecting doorway.

"Put the car in the garage," Cunard said tersely. "And after dinner repair the spare tire. Some fool left a broken bottle on the road."

The Negro remained standing where he was, and Cunard saw then that he was trembling with fear.

"Well, what the devil's the matter?"

Christopher ran his tongue over his upper lip. "Can't go out dere, sar," he said.

"Can't . . . Why not?"

"De holes in de yard. Der dere again."

For the first time in more than an hour Cunard permitted himself to smile. While he was totally without sympathy for the superstitions of these blacks, he found the intermittent reoccurrence of these holes in his property amusing. For he knew quite well that superstition had nothing to do with them.

It all went back to that most diabolical of buccaneers, Francis L'Ollonais and his voyage to the Gulf of Venezuela in the middle of the seventeenth century. After sacking Maracaibo, L'Ollonais sailed with his murderous crew for Tortuga. He ran into heavy storms and was forced to put back in here at Trinidad.

THREE or four years ago some idiot by the idiotic name of Arlanpeel had written and published a pamphlet entitled *Fifty Thousand Pieces of Eight* in which he sought to prove by various references that L'Ollonais had buried a portion of his pirate booty on Pistol Key. The pamphlet had sold out its small edition, and Cunard was aware that copies had now become a collector's item. As a result, Pistol Key had come into considerable fame. Tourists stopping off at Port-of-Spain frequently telephoned Cunard, asking permission to visit his property, a request which of course he always refused.

And the holes! From time to time during the night Cunard would be awakened by the sound of a spade grating against gravel, and looking out his bedroom window, he would see a carefully shielded lantern down among the cabbage palms. In the morning there would be a shallow excavation several feet across with the dirt heaped hastily on all four sides.

The thought of persons less fortunate than himself making clandestine efforts to capture a mythical fortune dating to the seventeenth century touched Cunard's sense of humor.

"You heard me, Christopher," he snapped to the houseboy, "put the car in the garage."

But the black remained cowering by the door until Cunard, his patience exhausted, dealt him a sharp slap across the face with the flat of his hand. The boy's eyes kindled, and he went out silently.

Cunard went up to his bathroom and washed the road grime from his hands. Then he proceeded to dress for his solitary

dinner, a custom which he never neglected. Downstairs, he got to thinking again about those holes in his yard and decided to have a look at them. He took a flashlight and went out the rear entrance and under the cabbage palms. Fireflies flashed in the darkness and a belated Qu'-est-ce-qu'il-dit bird asked its eternal question.

Forty yards from the house he came upon the diggings Christopher had reported. That they were the work of some ambitious fortune hunter was made doubly apparent by the discarded tape-measure and the cheap compass which lay beside the newly turned earth.

Again Cunard smiled. It would be "forty paces from this point to the north end of a shadow cast by a man fifteen hands high," or some such fiddlefaddle. Even if L'Ollonais had ever buried money here—and there was no direct evidence that he had—it had probably been carted away long years ago.

He saw Christopher returning from the garage then. The houseboy was walking swiftly, mumbling a low litany to himself. In his right hand he held a small cross fashioned of two bent twigs.

Back in the house, Cunard told himself irritably that Christopher was a fool. After all, he had seen his mother come into plenty of trouble because of her insistance on practicing *obeah*. She had professed to be an *obeah*-woman and was forever speaking incantations over broken eggshells, bones, tufts of hair and other disagreeable objects. Employed as a laundress by Cunard, he had discovered her one day dropping a white powder into his tea cup, and, unmindful of her plea that it was merely a good-health charm designed to cure his recurrent spells of malaria, he had turned her over to the Constabulary. He had pressed charges too, testifying that the woman had attempted to poison him. Largely because of his influence, she had been convicted and sent to the Convict Depot at Tobago. Christopher had stayed on because he had no other place to go.

The meal over, Cunard went into the library with the intention of reading for several hours. Although the *Times* and the *Daily Mail* reached him in bundles of six copies a fortnight or so after they were published, he made it a practice to read only Monday's copy on Monday and so on through the week, thus preserving the impression that he was still in England.

But this night as he strode across to his favorite chair, he drew up short with a gasp. The complete week's bundle of newspapers had been torn open and their contents scattered about in a wild disorganized pile. To add to this sacrilege, one of the sheets had a ragged hole in it where an entire column had been torn out. For an instant Cunard was speechless. Then he wheeled on Christopher.

"Come here, you black devil," he roared. "Did you do this?"

The houseboy looked puzzled.

"No, sar," he said.

"Don't lie to me. How dare you open my papers?"

But Christopher insisted he knew nothing of the matter. He had placed the papers on their arrival in the library and had not touched them since.

Cunard's rage was mounting steadily. A mistake he might have excused, but an out-and-out lie . . .

"Come with me,' he said in a cold voice.

Deliberately he led the way into the kitchen, looked about him carefully. Nothing there. He went back across the little corridor of the houseboy's small room under the stairway. While Christopher stood protesting in the doorway, Cunard marched across to the table and silently picked up a torn section of a newspaper.

"So you did lie!" he snarled.

The sight of the houseboy with his perpetual grin there in the doorway was too much for the planter. His rage beyond control, he seized the first object within reach—a heavy length of wood resting on a little bracket mounted on the wall—and threw it with all his strength.

THE missile struck Christopher squarely on the temple. He uttered no cry, but remained motionless a moment, the grin frozen on his face. Then his legs buckled and he slumped slowly to the floor.

Cunard's fists clenched. "That'll teach you to respect other people's property," he said. His anger, swift to come, was receding as quickly, and noting that the houseboy lay

utterly still, he stepped forward and stirred him with his foot.

Christopher's head rolled horribly.

Quickly Cunard stooped and felt for a pulse. None was discernible. With trembling fingers he drew out a pocket mirror and placed it by the boy's lips. For a long moment he held it there, but there was no resultant cloud of moisture. Christopher was dead!

Cunard staggered across to a chair and sat down. Christopher's death was one thing and one thing only—murder! The fact that he was a man of color and Cunard an influential planter would mean nothing in a Crown court of law. He could see the bewigged magistrate now; he could hear the evidence of island witnesses, testifying as to his uncontrollable temper, his savage treatment of servants.

Even if there were not actual danger of incarceration—and he knew there was—it would mean the loss of his social position and prestige.

And then Cunard happened to think of the holes in his yard. A new one—a grave for the dead houseboy—would never be noticed, and he could always improvise some sort of story that the boy had run off. As far as Cunard knew, other than the old crone who was his mother, Christopher had no other kin, having come originally from Jamaica.

The planter was quite calm now. He went to his room, changed to a suit of old clothes and a pair of rubber-soled shoes. Then, returning to the little room under the stairs, he rolled the body of the houseboy into a piece of sailcloth and carried it out into the yard.

He chose a spot near the far corner of his property where a clump of bamboo grew wild and would effectually shield him from any prying eyes. But there were no prying eyes, and half an hour later Cunard returned to the house: There he carefully cleaned the clinging loam from the garden spade, washed his shoes and brushed his trousers.

It was when he went again to the room under the stairs to gather together Christopher's few possessions that he saw the piece of wood that had served as the death missile. Cunard picked it up and frowned. The thing was an *obeah* fetish apparently, an ugly little carving with a crude likeness of an animal head and a squat human body. The lower half of the image ended in a flat panel, the surface of which was covered with wavy lines, so that the prostrate figure looked as if it were partially immersed in water. Out of that carved water two arms extended upward, as in supplication, and they were arms that were strangely reminiscent for Cunard. Christopher's mother had had arms like that, smooth and strangely youthful for a person of her age. There was even a chip of white coral on one of the fingers like the coral ring the old woman always wore.

Cunard threw the thing on to the pile of other objects he had gathered: spare clothes, several bright colored scarves, a sack of cheap tobacco, made a bundle of them and burned them in the old-fashioned cook stove with which the kitchen was equipped.

The last object to go into the fire was the newspaper clipping, and the planter saw then with a kind of grim horror that Christopher had not lied at all, that the top of the paper in fact bore a date-line several months old and was one of a lot he had given to the houseboy "to look at de pictures."

FOR SEVERAL days after that Cunard did not leave his house. He felt nervous and ill-at-ease, and he caught himself looking out the window toward the bamboo thicket on more than one occasion. Curiously too, there was an odd murmuring in his ears like the sound of distant water flowing.

On the third day, however, he was sufficiently himself to make a trip to town. He drove the car at a fast clip to Port-of-Spain, parked on Marine Square and went about his business. He was walking down Frederick Street half an hour later when he suddenly became aware that an aged Negro woman with head tied in a red kerchief was following him.

Cunard didn't have a direct view of her until just as he turned a corner, and then only a glance, but his heart stopped dead still for an instant. Surely that black woman was Christopher's mother whom he had sent to prison. True, her face was almost hidden by the folds of the loosely-draped kerchief, but he had seen her hand, and there was the

coral ring on it. Wild thoughts rushed to Cunard's head. Had the woman been released then? Had she missed her son, and did she suspect what had happened?

Cunard drew up in a doorway, but the old crone did not pass him, and when he looked back down the street, she was nowhere in sight.

Nevertheless the incident unnerved him. When, later in the day, he met Inspector Bainley of the Constabulary, he seized the opportunity to ask several questions that would ease his mind.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" Bainley asked. "I haven't seen much of you lately."

Cunard lit a cigar with what he hoped was a certain amount of casualness.

"I've been pretty busy," he replied. "My houseboy skipped, you know. The blighter packed off without warning."

"So?" said Bainley. "I thought Christopher was a pretty steady chap."

"In a way," said Cunard. "And in a way he wasn't." And then: "By the way, do you remember his mother? I was wondering whether she had been released. I thought I saw her a moment ago on the street."

The Inspector smiled a thin smile. "Then you were seeing things," he said. "She committed suicide over at the Convict Depot at Tobago two months ago."

Cunard stared.

"At least we called it suicide," Inspector Bainley went on. "She took some sort of an *obeah* potion when she found we weren't going to let her go, and simply lay back and died. It was rather odd that the medico couldn't find any trace of poison though."

CUNARD was rather vague about the rest of the day's events. He recalled making some trifling purchases, but his mind was wandering, and twice he had to be reminded to pick up his change. At four o'clock he abruptly found himself thinking of his old friend, Hugh Donay, and the fact that Donay had employed Christopher's mother a year or so before she had entered Cunard's services. Donay had a villa just outside of town, and it would take only a few moments to see him. Of course there was no reason to see him. If Bainley said the old woman had committed suicide, that settled it. Yet Cunard told himself the Inspector might have been mistaken or perhaps joking. He himself was a strong believer in the powers of observation, and it bothered him to have doubts cast upon them.

The planter drove through the St. Clair district and turned into a driveway before a sprawling house with a roof of red tile. Donay, a thin waspish man, was lounging in a hammock and greeted Cunard effusively.

"Tried to get you by phone the other day," he said, "but you weren't at home. Had something to tell you. About that L'Ollonais treasure that's supposed to be buried on your property."

Cunard frowned. "Have you started believing that too?"

"This was an article in the *Daily Mail*, and it had some new angles that were rather interesting. I get my paper here in town before you do out there on Pistol Key, you know."

Cunard attempted to swing the conversation into other channels, but Donay was persistent.

"Funny thing about that article," he said. "I read it the same day the burglar was here."

"Burglar?" Cunard lifted his eyes.

"Well," Donay said, "Jim Barrett was over here, and I showed him the paper. Barret said it was the first description he had read that sounded logical and that the directions given for locating the treasure were very clear and concise. Just at that moment there was a sound in the corridor, and Barrett leaped up and made a dash for the kitchen.

"I might tell you that for several days I thought prowlers were about. The lock on the cellar door was found broken, and several times I'd heard footsteps in the laundry-room. Several things were out of place in the laundry-room too, though what anyone would want there is more than I can see.

"Anyway, Barrett shouted that someone was in the house. We followed the sounds down into the cellar, and just as we entered the door into the laundry-room, there was a crash and the sound of glass breaking."

Donay smiled sheepishly as if to excuse all these details.

"It was only a bottle of bluing," he went on, "but what I can't figure out is how the prowler got in and out of that room without our seeing anyone pass. There's only one door, you know, and the windows are all high up."

"Was anything stolen?" Cunard asked.

"Nothing that I'm aware of. That bluing though was running across the floor toward a hamper of clean linen, and without thinking I used the first thing handy to wipe it up. It happened to be the newspaper with that treasure article in it. So I'm afraid . . ."

"It doesn't matter. I can read it in my copy," Cunard said. But even as he spoke, a vision of his own torn paper flashed to him.

"That isn't quite all," Donay said. "The next day I found every blessed wastebasket in the house turned upside down and their contents scattered about. Queer, isn't it?"

The conversation changed after that, and they talked of idle things. But just before he left Cunard said casually: "By the way, my houseboy Christopher's run off. Didn't his mother work for you as a laundress or something?"

"That's right," Donay said, "I turned her over to you when I took a trip up to the States. Don't you remember?"

CUNARD drove through town again, heading for the highway to Pistol Key. He had just turned off Marine Square when he suddenly slammed down hard on the brakes. The woman darted from the curb directly into his path, and with the lowering sun in his eyes, he did not see her until it was too late. Cunard got out of the car, shaking like a leaf, fully expecting to find a crumpled body on the bumper.

But there was no one there, and a group of Portuguese street laborers eyed him curiously as he peered around and under the car. He was almost overcome with relief, but at the same time he was disturbed. For in that flash he had seen of the woman against the sun, he was almost sure he had seen the youthful dark-skinned arms of Christopher's mother.

Back at Pistol Key Cunard spent an uneasy night. The sensation of distant running water was stronger in his ears now. "Too much quinine," he told himself. "I'll have to cut down on the stuff."

He lay awake for some time, thinking of the day's events. But as he went over the major details in retrospection, he found himself supplying the missing minor details and so fell into a haze of peaceful drowsiness.

At two o'clock by the radium clock on the chiffonier, he awoke abruptly. The house was utterly still, but through the open window came an intermittent metallic sound. It died away, returned after an interval of several minutes. Cunard got out of bed, put on his brocaded dressing robe and strode to the window. A full moon illumined the grounds save where the palmistes cast their darker shadow, and there was no living person in evidence.

Below him and slightly to the left there was a freshly dug hole. But it was not that that caused Cunard to pass his hands before his eyes as if he had been dreaming. It was the sight of a spade alternately disappearing in the hole and reappearing to pile the loosened soil on the growing mound. A spade that moved slowly, controlled by aged yet youthful-appearing arms and hands—*but arms unattached to any human body!*

In the morning Cunard called the Port-of-Spain *Journal*, instructing them to run an advertisement for a houseboy, a task which he had neglected the day before. Then he went out to his post box to get the mail.

The morning mist had not yet cleared. It hung over the hibiscus hedges like an endless line of white shrouds. As he reached the end of the lane, Cunard thought he saw a figure turn from the post box and move quickly toward a grove of ceiba trees. He thought nothing of it at first, for those trees flanked the main road which was traveled by residents of the little native settlement at the far end of Pistol Key. But then he realized that the figure had moved away from the road, in a direction leading obliquely toward his own house.

Still the matter did not concern him particularly until he opened the post box. There was a single letter there, and it had not come by regular mail; the dirty brown envelope bore neither stamp nor cancellation mark. Inside was a torn piece of newspaper.

Cunard realized at once that it was the missing piece from his *Daily Mail*. But who besides Christopher could have had access to the house and who would steal a news-

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paper column and return it in the post box?

The first part was a commonplace enough account of the opening of new auction parlors in Southwick Street, London, and a description of some of the more unusual articles that had been placed for sale there. Cunard, reading swiftly, found his eye attracted to the following:

> Among the afternoon offerings was the library of the late Sir Adrian Fell of Queen Anne's Court, which included an authentic first edition of McNair's *Bottle of Heliotrope* and a rare quarto volume of *Lucri Causa*. There was also a curious volume which purported to be the diary of the Caribbean buccaneer, Francis L'Ollonais, written while under the protection of the French West India Company at Tortuga.
>
> This correspondent had opportunity to examine the latter book and found some interesting passages. According to the executors of the estate, it had been obtained by Sir Adrian on his trip to Kingston in 1904, and so far as is known, is the only copy in existence.
>
> Under the heading, "The Maracaibo voyage," L'Ollonais describes his destruction of that town, of his escape with an enormous booty, and of the storms which beset him on his return trip to Tortuga. It is here that the diary ceases to be a chronological datebook and becomes instead a romantic narrative.
>
> L'Ollonais, driven southward, managed to land on Trinidad, on a promontory known as Pistol Key. There "By a greate pile of stone whiche looked fair like two horses running," he buried the equivalent of fifty thousand pieces of eight. His directions for locating the treasure are worth quoting:
>
> "Sixty paces from the south forward angle of the horse rock to the crossing of a line west by south west by the com-

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pass from a black painted stone shaped like a broken needle near the shore. At this point if a man will stand in the light of a full moon at the eleventh hour, the shadow of his head will fall upon the place."

HOW many persons, he wondered, had seen that newspaper story. There was Hugh Donay and Jim Barrett, of course, but they didn't count. Few others here subscribed to the *Daily Mail*. Of those that did, the odds were against any of them wading through such a dull account. The fact remained, however, that someone had read it in his own copy and had been sufficiently interested to tear it from the sheet. Who was that person? And why had they seen fit to return it by way of his post box?

The landmarks he knew only too well. He had often remarked that that stone near the end of his property resembled two galloping horses. And the black stone "like a broken needle" was still there, a rod or two from the shore.

Suddenly fear struck Cunard—fear that he might already be too late. He leaped from his chair and ran out into the grounds.

There were four holes and the beginning of a fifth in evidence. But, moving from one to another, the planter saw with relief that all were shallow and showed no traces of any object having been taken from them.

Cunard hastened back to the house where he procured a small but accurate compass and a ball of twine. Then he went into the tool-house and brought out a pair of oars for the dory that was moored at the water's edge on a little spit of sand.

An hour later his work was finished. He had rowed the dory out to the needle point of rock and fastened one end of the twine to it. The other end he stretched across to the horse rock in the corner of his property. Then he counted off the required sixty paces and planted a stick in the ground to mark the spot. After that there was nothing he could do until night. He hoped there would be no clouds to obstruct the moon.

During the war Cunard had made a superficial study of electricity and wireless as part of what he considered his patriotic duties, and he now proceeded to wire a

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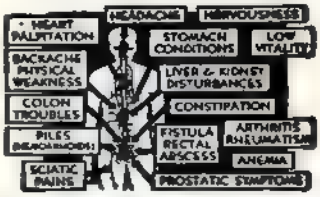

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crude but efficient alarm system around the general area where he conceived the treasure to be. Back in the house, he settled himself to wait until the moon-rise. In the quiet of inactivity he was conscious again of that sound of distant water flowing. He made a round of all taps in the house, but none was leaking.

During his solitary dinner he caught himself glancing out the window into the grounds, and once he thought he saw a shadow move across the lawn and into the trees. But it must have been a passing cloud, for he didn't see it again.

At two p.m. a knock sounded on the door. Cunard was surprised and somewhat disconcerted to see Inspector Bainley standing on the veranda.

"Just passing by," Bainley said, smiling genially. "Had a sudden call from the native village out on the Key. Seems a black boy got into some trouble out there. Thought it might be your Christopher."

"But that's impossible—" Cunard checked himself. "I hardly think it likely," he amended. "Christopher would probably go as far as he could, once he started."

They drank rum. The Inspector seemed in no hurry to leave, and Cunard was torn between two desires, not to be alone and to be free from Bainley's gimlet eyes which always seemed to be moving about restlessly.

Finally he did go, however. The throb of his car was just dying off down the road when Cunard heard a new sound which electrified him to attention. The alarm bell!

Yet there was no one in the grounds. The wires were undisturbed, and the makeshift switch he had fashioned was still open. The bell was silent when he reached it.

With the moon high over his shoulder Cunard wielded his spade rapidly. The spot where the shadow of his head fell was disagreeably close to the bamboo thicket where he had buried Christopher, but as a matter of fact, he wasn't quite sure where that grave was, so cleverly had he hidden all traces of his work.

The hole had now been dug to a depth of four feet, but there was no indication anything had been buried there. Cunard toiled strenuously another half hour. And then quite suddenly his spade struck something

hard and metallic. A wave of excitement swept over him. He switched on his flashlight and turned it in the hole. Yes, there it was, the rusted top of a large iron chest —the treasure of L'Ollonais.

He resumed digging, but as he dug he became aware that the sand, at first dry and hard, had grown moist and soggy. The spade became increasingly heavy with each scoop, and presently water was running off it, glistening in the moonlight. Water began to fill the bottom of the hole too, making it difficult for Cunard to work.

But it was not until ten minutes later he saw something protruding from the water. In the moonlight two slender dark objects were reaching outward, a pair of Negro feminine arms gently weaving to and fro.

Cunard stiffened while a wave of horror swept over him. They were dark-skinned arms of an aged Negress, yet somehow they were smooth and youthful. The middle finger of the left hand bore a ring of white coral. Cunard screamed and lunged backward. Too late, one of those grasping hands encircled his ankle and jerked him forward. And as he fell across the hole, those hands wrapped themselves about his throat and drew his head slowly but deliberately downward. . . .

"Yes, it's a queer case," Bainley said, tamping tobacco into his pipe. "But then, of course, no more queer than a lot of things that happen here in the islands."

"You say this fellow, Cunard, murdered his houseboy, Christopher?" the Warrant-Officer said.

Bainley nodded, "I knew his savage temper would get the better of him some day. He buried the body in the yard and apparently rigged up that alarm arrangement to warn him of any trespassers. Then he contrived that story which he told me, that Christopher had run off.

"Of course we know now that Cunard was trying to find that buried treasure by following the directions given in that newspaper clipping. But that doesn't explain why he disregarded those directions and attempted to dig open the houseboy's grave again. Or why, before he had finished, he thrust his head into the shallow hole and lay in the pool of seepage water until he drowned.

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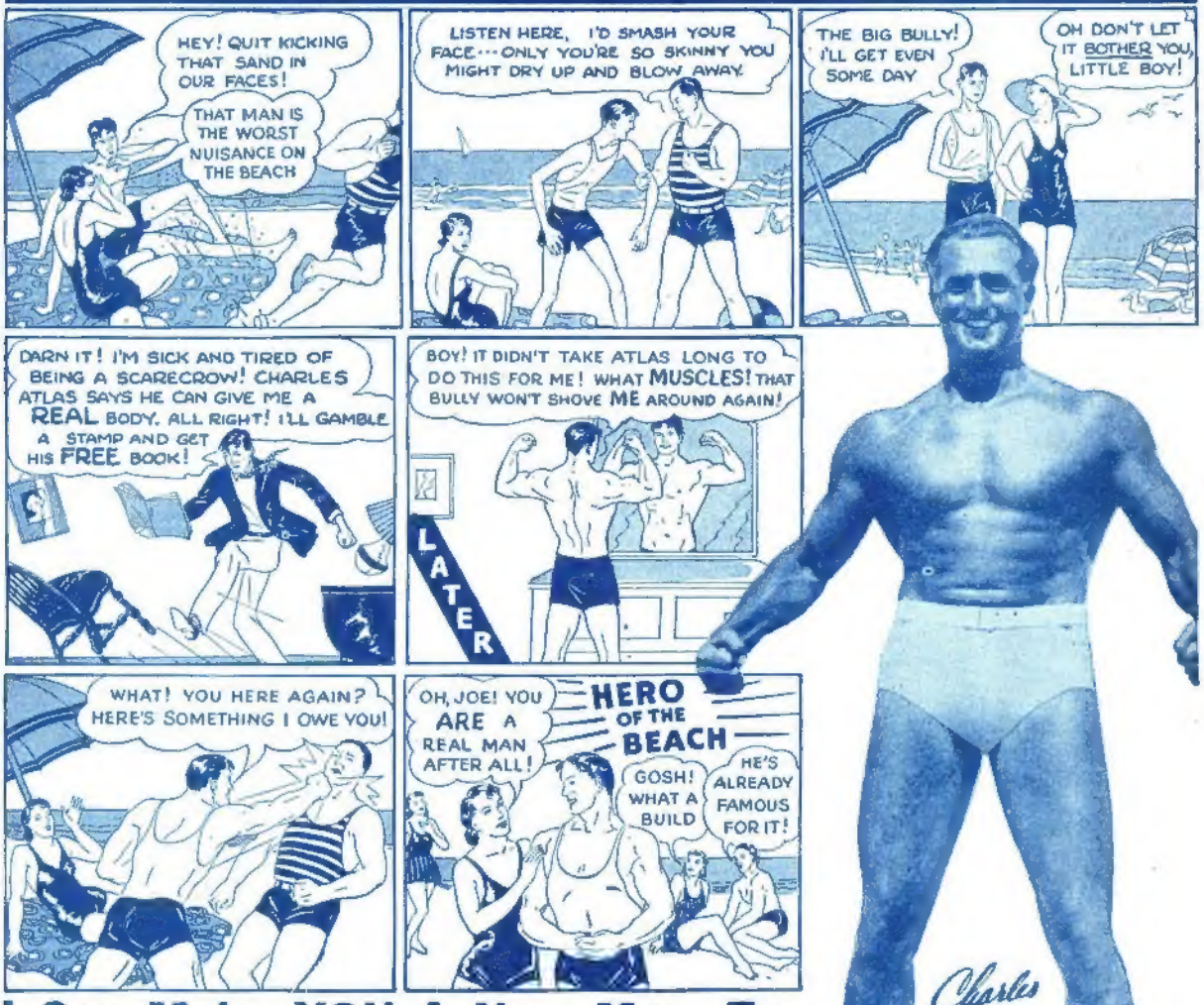

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